



Workplace Collaboration in Australia and New Zealand

Trends, behaviours and impact

White paper based on a study across Australia and New Zealand.

Contents

Methodology	3
Overview	4
Introduction	6
The Evolving Workforce and Workplace	8
The Business Leaders' Choice - and Challenge	9
The Importance of Getting it Right	10
For Workers	10
For Flexible Working	11
For Business	12
For Culture	13
Barriers to Collaborative Communication at Work	14
The Collaborative Experience	15
Final Word	16



Key of Terms



Collaborative Workers

Those working full or part time who communicate using technology with business stakeholders, 5 or more times a day. They work in professional / white collar environments or industries (“business owners”, “managers”, “professional”, or “technical or trades worker”, “Community and Personal Service”, and “sales worker”) either as an employee or a business owner/manager.



Employee (worker)

Any Collaborative Worker who has a non-managerial, non-decision making role at work.



Business Owner Manager (BOM)

Any Collaborative Worker who has a mid-senior level managerial role or owns/part owns a business.



Collaborative Workplaces

Any workplace where BOMs are Collaborative Workers.



Collaborative Technology

“Live file/content sharing and annotations”, “video/web conferencing” and “team/group messaging”.



Flexible Work Practices

“Hot desking in the office”, “Working remotely”, and “Mobile working or working ‘on-the-go’”.



Flexible Workplaces

Collaborative Workplaces who have become more open to Flexible Work Practices.

Methodology

The study was conducted among 1,202 Collaborative Workers and Business Owner / Managers in Australia and New Zealand.

Surveys were distributed throughout Australia and New Zealand including both capital city and non-capital city areas as shown below.

Fieldwork commenced on Friday 20th October 2017 and was completed on Thursday 26th October 2017.

This study was conducted online amongst members of a permission-based panel.

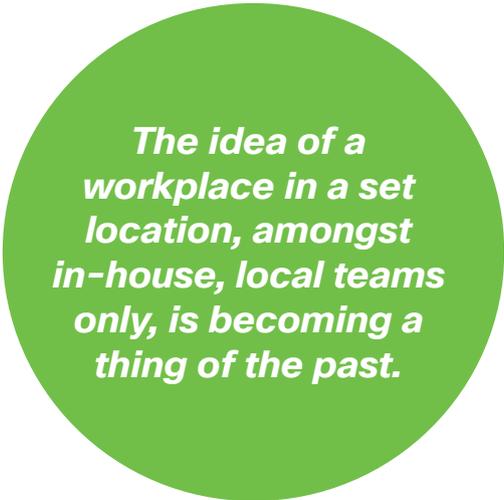
After interviewing, data was weighted to the latest population estimates sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics New Zealand.

This study aimed to explore workers’ and managers’ attitudes towards collaborative workplaces and the tools to assist them.

Overview

The very nature of the workforce is shifting

The idea of a workplace in a set location, amongst in-house, local teams only, is becoming a thing of the past. Almost three quarters (74%) of businesses now recognise the benefits of ‘adaptable teams’ to efficiently complete tasks, so it’s no surprise that half (49%) of today’s workforce is using freelance and contract workers as part of its business structure.



The idea of a workplace in a set location, amongst in-house, local teams only, is becoming a thing of the past.

The growth of flexible working

Of the 11.1 million workers in ANZ, 61% are working flexibly. Originally commonplace in enterprise, flexible working is now increasingly prevalent in medium and small businesses however, to be successful, this new way of working requires effective methods of collaboration.

There are benefits of this shift to businesses and workers alike

Almost all (96%) business leaders believe the use of collaborative technologies can be a source of competitive advantage, while three quarters (73%) of workers view flexibility as a benefit of collaborative tools. Cisco predicts the demand for collaboration tools will continue to grow ten fold.

Benefits of adopting collaborative technology



96% business leaders believe collaboration is the source of competitive advantage

“Work happens anywhere”



73% workers like the flexibility

However, not everyone is seeing the benefits yet

Just 29% of workers communicate as effectively as they would like and 67% have communication issues with colleagues, suppliers and other businesses. 3 in 10 (30%) ineffective communicators find issues with the communication tools themselves, commonly because the existing equipment is unsuitable or not user friendly, or simply because the tools are just not available to them.

Focus on the experience, not just the technology

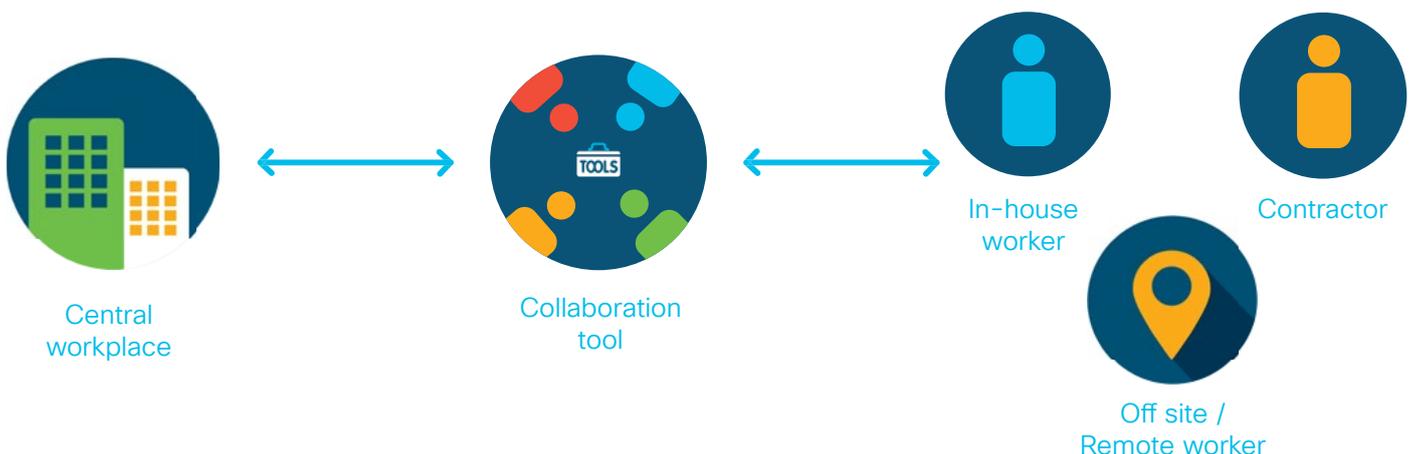
Ineffective communication can create a negative experience, particularly amongst those working flexibly. Amongst the 61% of workers who are already engaged with flexible work practices, half feel disconnected when working remotely and 3 in 5 (60%) find flexible working difficult because they don't have effective collaboration and communication tools. Even when the tools are present, they often aren't up to scratch. Almost 9 in 10 (87%) workers believe existing communication and collaboration tools in their workplace could do with improvement and 4 in 5 (82%) workers admit that poor user experience of existing tools restricts usage. In fact, 3 in 5 (62%) would even consider switching their job to access effective collaboration technologies.

Effective collaboration and flexible teams are key to success

With 86% of businesses identifying collaborative and flexible teams as key to the success of their organisation, there is no denying the workplace of the future looks very different to now. To get it right, the adoption of effective collaborative tools is a necessity, and getting it wrong can do more harm than good.

Workplace of the future

The ecosystem of the correct collaboration tool and technology allows everyone to work efficiently where-ever, whenever.



Introduction

The very nature of collaboration in the workplace is shifting, and whilst it's always been necessary to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, clients, suppliers and other business stakeholders, the methods of doing so are evolving for many of the 11.1 million workers.

Following the infiltration of technology into the home, it's no surprise that two thirds (69%) of employees have increased their use of collaborative technology in the workplace. Whilst employees are increasing in their usage, business leaders are following suit, adopting and implementing such solutions on an even greater scale, with 73% of workplaces having increasingly encouraged the use of collaborative technology in the past five years. This surge in communication via technology has had a dramatic effect on in-person contact amongst employees, with face-to-face conversations reducing by a quarter (24%), saving time and money on non-essential travel.

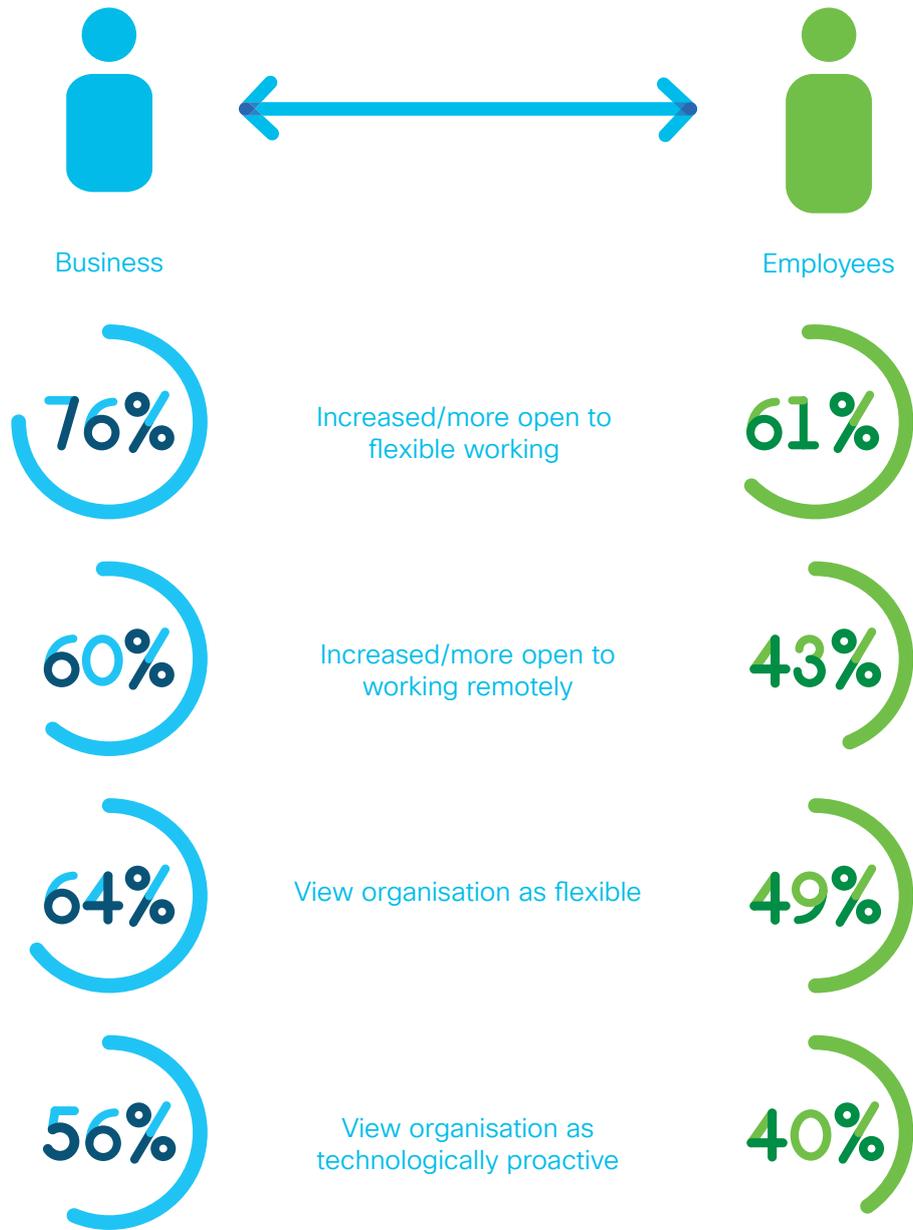


There is a disconnect between what businesses are saying and what employees are doing.

Similarly, in the past five years, three quarters (76%) of businesses have become more open to offering their employees flexible working conditions and 60% are open to offering remote or mobile working. However the percentage of employees taking up this offering indicates there is a disconnect between what businesses are saying and what employees are doing, with only 61% of employees having adopted flexibility in their work during that same period and, most notably, just 43% of employees working remotely. Similarly, business leaders also hold a very different view to their workers when it comes to the perceived flexibility and technological merits of their organisations. Business leaders are more likely than their staff to view their organisation as flexible (64% business leaders compared with workers 49%) and technologically proactive (56% business leaders compared with workers 40%).



Business vs employees perspectives on workplace policies



This is further evidenced by the 28% of employees who admit the business they work for is slow to adopt technological advances, and 25% who go so far as to say their workplace has inflexible work practices or discourages agile working. In essence, whilst the workplace and workforce is being redefined, there remains the opportunity for further action to reassure employees that they can carry out their job to the same standard from any location through collaborative technology.

Whilst the benefits resulting from the right collaborative technologies in an organisation are the focus of this report, it's important to acknowledge the barriers which arise when it's not done well. This white paper provides guidance in finding the appropriate tools and policies in what often seems a space inundated with options, information and colloquial language or jargon.

The evolving workforce and workplace

Both the workforce and workplace are changing, rapidly. Tech-literate millennial workers, the rise of work-life balance and the proliferation of collaborative technology in the home are just some of the factors driving this change.

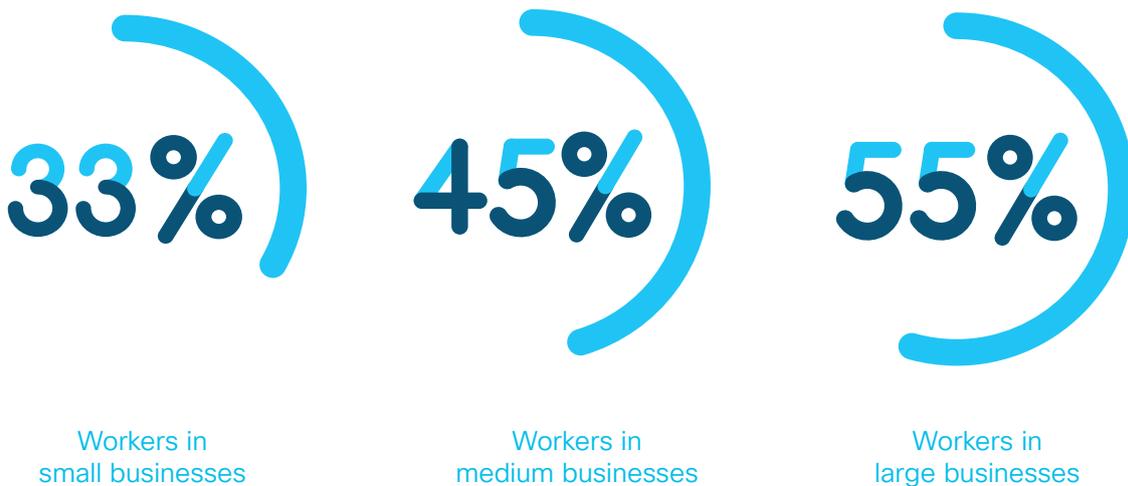
Collaboration amongst the workforce is more important now than ever as three quarters (74%) of business leaders believe adaptable teams are more prevalent within the workplace, with the increased recruitment of freelance or contract workers (39%). Similarly they are seeing an increased emphasis on working in locations suitable to the employee (31%) coupled with a decreased emphasis on working in a main office (34%), all of which adds to the appetite for remote teams.

Therefore, what companies have been offering their employees up until now is not necessarily what they want, or need, any longer, with 4 in 5 (81%) workers looking to increase their access to flexible work practices over the next five years.

As a result, adoption of collaborative technologies and flexible work practices is high, as businesses work to make this desire a reality. More workplaces are beginning to offer solutions that enable employees to tailor the way they work with three quarters (76%) of business leaders already adopting new collaborative practices.

Large businesses are fast moving towards flexible work practices. Workers in businesses with 200 or more employees are the most likely to increase their access to flexible working over the next five years (55%) and 2 in 5 (40%) workers in SMBs intend to do the same.

Intention to increase access to flexible working



The business leaders' choice - and challenge

Despite the desire to evolve - from both employees and businesses - some business leaders are reluctant to act and actually adopt or utilise the latest in collaborative technology. In fact, 93% cite at least one barrier to the implementation or utilisation of such technologies in their organisation, and, for some, it can seem a battle to get it right.

The most commonly cited reasons, however, do not relate to the technology but to fears and worries, either around security and privacy (29%) or unproductive employees (25%). Given that optimising a workplace for effective collaboration and communication can be a complex task, further reluctance cites financial and time costs, as well as lack of IT support:

Barriers to the implementation of collaborative technology



Security & privacy (29%)
(small 24%, medium 30%,
large 34%)



Productivity (25%)
(small 26%, medium 30%,
large 26%)



Lack of IT support (24%)
(small 28%, medium 21%,
large 24%)



Financial (21%)
(small 17%, medium 25%,
large 20%)



Time (19%)
(small 14%, medium 23%,
large 19%)

The importance of getting it right

This report will discuss some of the barriers and difficulties involved with implementing successful collaborative workplace solutions, however the benefits achieved when the right solutions are implemented are unparalleled.

For workers

Almost all (94%) workers agree there is at least one benefit to using collaborative tools in the workplace.



3 in 5 (62%) workers would consider switching their job to access collaboration tools in the workplace.

Three quarters (73%) consider the flexibility provided is a benefit – especially the fact that work can happen anytime, anywhere (42%) – while 7 in 10 (71%) believe collaborative tools aid with efficiently managed workflow and half (50%) see the specific benefit in keeping everyone up-to-date with current information or documentation.

By utilising effective collaboration tools in the workplace, two thirds (67%) of workers claim to benefit from improved communications, even with those not in their immediate vicinity (40%).

Technologies provide the ability to work from home and when a worker has the ability to mould their work around commitments and other aspects of their life, job satisfaction and efficacy increase. This in turn means they are more productive and the mutual benefits for business and workers become evident.

For 1 in 5 (22%) workers, some form of flexible work is most important in enabling them to do their job better, and 1 in 5 (21%) suggest they are able to do their job better with collaborative tech.

Working to suit individual lifestyles is one of the key benefits of flexible work practices, and 26% would go as far as saying it is important to maximise their job satisfaction.

The **overwhelming majority of workers (87%) would continue working for employers if provided collaborative technologies and flexible work practices.** However, it's important to understand how this can impact the workplace, both for the individual and their team. Whilst flexibility means work can be done from anywhere at any time, counter-productive practices or ineffective tools can hinder the desired process, so it's important to ensure the right choices are made.

For flexible working

When physically in the same location, connecting with others is a simple task, yet working remotely requires effective methods of communication.

Despite advancements in collaborative tools, 9 in 10 (87%) feel there is at least one barrier to working remotely or ‘on-the-go’ and still being productive while inadequate tech solutions are considered a barrier by more than 7 in 10 (72%) workers. With inadequate tech, it becomes harder for employees working away from the workplace to communicate with others, leading to feelings of isolation (58%). The most common isolation-related barrier is a lack of face-to-face collaboration with colleagues in different locations (32%) followed by feeling disconnected based on a location (27%).



Workers acknowledge that inefficient technologies can reduce the effectiveness of collaboration when working remotely. Amongst the 61% of workers already engaged with flexible work practices, half feel they are disconnected when working remotely and 3 in 5 (60%) find remote working difficult because they don’t have effective collaboration and communication tools.

However, the majority of workers (84%) believe the right collaboration and communication tools would allow flexible working in a way that suits them.



Working anytime



Working anywhere

For business

Similar to workers, business leaders understand the importance of having an effective collaborative workplace. In fact, business leaders have more to gain than employees via implementing innovative technologies with 86% of businesses identifying collaborative and flexible teams as key to the ongoing success of their organisation.



Nearly all business leaders (96%) believe workplace collaboration, and the use of technology that enables it, can be a source of competitive advantage.



Business leaders see such technology in organisations can give competitive advantage by providing economic improvements (80%), more adaptable teams (58%), better relationships (52%), and HR benefits (34%).

Collaborative technologies and flexible working practices help to give businesses an edge in a competitive labour market. Along with the work-from-anywhere movement, business leaders are choosing to broaden their employee base and make use of a talent pool that's not geographically limited, allowing for the very best candidates based on skills and qualities.

9 in 10 (91%) business leaders see collaboration tools as key to helping businesses better meet this changing labour market, and 9 in 10 (91%) believe they enable the retention of valuable employees if they wanted to relocate.

In addition to labour and the workforce, 89% believe collaboration tools open up potential new markets in which to promote products and services.



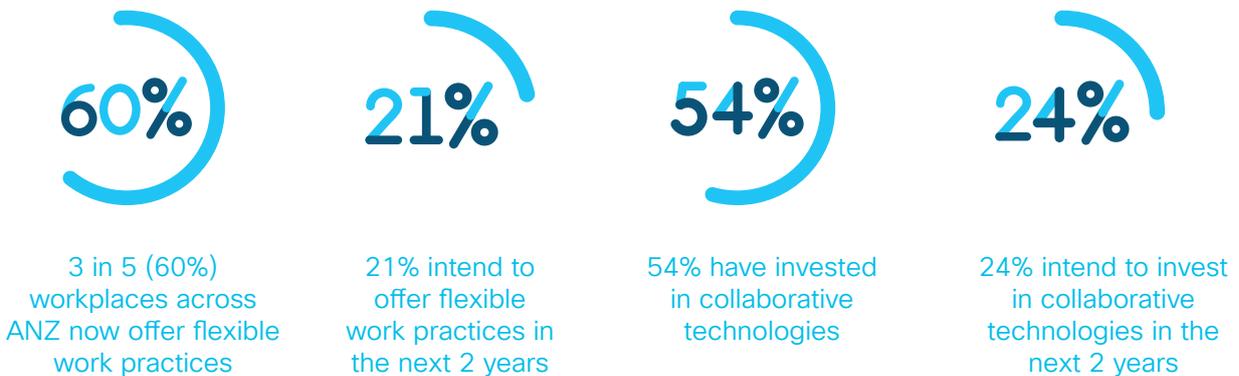
For culture

By fostering an environment where their workers are benefiting, organisations have an advantage in the acquisition and retention of staff. Culture, a term used throughout workplaces in any industry, has become commonplace when describing how an employee fits into a workplace.

The importance of culture, however, is not just about a fit between the two parties but it is increasingly becoming a point of difference that can be marketed to employees in order to gain the best talent. As such, 9 in 10 (87%) organisations have made some improvements to the workplace to benefit their employees in the last 2 years, and 63% intend to do so in the next 2 years.



Flexible working and collaborative technologies are a major contributor to workplace culture. Obviously, workers want access to tools that make their work life easier and more productive and it's becoming evident that businesses are listening:



Simply implementing flexible workplace practices, or incorporating the latest technology, however, isn't what is required for success. Businesses are recognising the importance of getting it right starts and ends with their employees - and giving them an experience overall, not just through technology. Half (52%) of workplaces have invested in training and development opportunities for their staff to help upskill and improve usage and adoption, highlighting that the tech stack is becoming more and more prevalent in workplace culture and employee satisfaction.

Barriers to collaborative communication at work

A significant reason behind the evolution of the workforce/workplace is due to a marked increase in communication and collaboration between people. This increase, compounded with an influx in workers across disparate locations, means challenges are bound to arise, so while employers are continuing to invest and offer flexible policies, not all workers are experiencing the benefits they hoped for.

Just 3 in 10 (29%) workers communicate as effectively as they'd like while two thirds (67%) have communication issues when collaborating. These challenges exist for all business types and sizes, however, workers in large businesses are more likely to experience at least one issue that limits effective communication (large businesses 69% compared with small businesses 61% and medium businesses 65%). If not properly addressed, these barriers to communication can have harmful impacts.

Amongst those experiencing communication problems, more than half cite logistical challenges, including different locations (40%) and problems scheduling face-to-face meetings (41%). Logistics are not the only significant barrier to effective communication. 3 in 10 (30%) ineffective communicators find issues with their communication tools, most commonly because equipment is unsuitable or not user friendly (21%) or simply because of a distinct lack of tools (14%). Millennial workers, who are often-perceived as the most technologically capable, are the most likely to indicate problematic tools prevent effective communication (Millennials 33% compared with Gen X, Baby Boomers 28%).



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This highlights the fact that unsuitable, dated, difficult to use or poorly implemented technology actually hinder the level of effective collaboration in the workplace.

Video conferencing, itself designed to assist with collaboration and combat the challenge of not being able to meet face-to-face, can involve a set of issues of its own. 4 in 5 (80%) workers mention at least one barrier exists to their use of video conferencing facilities, with Millennial workers again more likely to cite barriers (Millennials 88% compared with Gen X 75%, Baby Boomers 75%).

Reasons related to lack of availability are the most commonly cited barriers to using video conferencing facilities to communicate or collaborate with business stakeholders (78%). The most common availability barrier is the need for pre-booking/arranging of video conferencing facilities (33%).

Perceived barriers to technology



21% of workers find communication tools unsuitable or not user friendly.



33% of workers require pre-booking of rooms where technology is located.



78% of workers cite a lack of availability to collaborative technology.

The collaborative experience

With more options than ever available to create a collaborative workplace in the most innovative of ways, it can be tough to stay up-to-date. This means workplaces often have technologies or practices that may be past their prime or not as efficient as possible, which can have a knock-on effect across the business. This appears a very common occurrence, with almost 9 in 10 (87%) workers believing communication and collaboration tools in their workplace could do with improvement.

Whilst ineffective tools can pose problems for all, workers in medium sized organisations are the most likely to believe those in their workplace can be improved (92% compared with small business at 82% and large businesses at 86%).

In line with these findings, usage of collaboration tools would significantly increase across the board if a better user experience was available, with medium sized business being the most likely to experience increased uptake (medium 88% compared with small 77%, large 81%).



For workplaces to function efficiently following implementation, it's important to take a holistic approach, and consider what happens after the technology is implemented, such as training and education, as well as ensuring the adoption of systems and practices occurs on a consistent organisation-wide basis.

Evidence shows that once technology has been adopted effectively, usage is likely to increase, with 61% of collaborative tech users wanting to continue increasing their use of such tools and more than half (56%) of flexible workers wanting to increase these practices.



Final word

There is no denying the workplace of the future will look very different to today. Business leaders are seeing their industry become disrupted and know they need to do something. Turning to technology can seem the obvious choice but, in fact, the very first place they should be starting is with their employees.

There is a no 'one-size-fits all' approach. While a solution might make workers in one business more productive, it could cause feelings of disconnect and frustration in another, so while the adoption of effective collaborative tools is a growing necessity, getting it wrong can do more harm than good.

While it's a step in the right direction that so many businesses have begun implementing collaborative tools and flexible working practices, some employees remain tentative about adopting them. The process of successful adoption involves so much more than installing state-of-the-art technology. Businesses need to understand the current needs, challenges and experiences of their employees, in order to decide what the best solutions and practices are for their workforce. Those businesses that invest in getting it right first time, will see adoption increase and culture thrive, creating an agile and future-proof workforce.

Empower teams with the collaborative tools to move work forward anytime, anywhere.

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