

Employees need more automated ways of working across boundaries, enabling better collaboration and helping their organizations remain competitive.

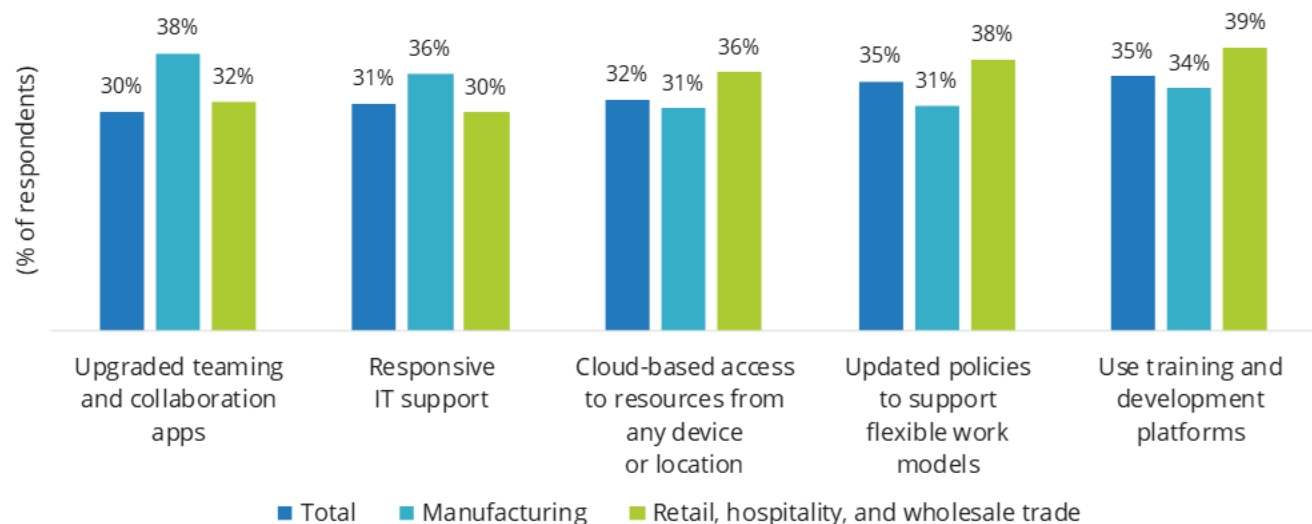
Planning for Productivity: Remote Device Support and Team Collaboration

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Executive Graphic

FIGURE 1: *Top Initiatives to Improve Employee Experiences*



n = 1,197 for total, *n* = 145 for manufacturing, *n* = 177 for retail, hospitality, and wholesale trade

Source: IDC Future of Work Global Survey, April 2023

Introduction

In current frontline work environments, the race is on to not only work more productively but do so in a way that encourages employees to be engaged and build expertise. Recent trends in automation technologies offer opportunities for workers to work more efficiently whether they are working onsite or via a digital workspace. The silver lining of the past several years of navigating remote work models has been the rapid development of digital work environments, enabling employees to collaborate more effectively and access the tools, applications, and human expertise they need from anywhere on any device (refer back to Figure 1). Not surprisingly, clients now expect rapid response time and service themselves.

Fortunately, automation of support from original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) translates to securing diagnostics and repair of equipment much more immediately rather than having to wait hours or days. And while manufacturing may be the first industry that comes to mind, embedded devices have become ubiquitous across many industries. Consider the complex diagnostic equipment in healthcare, point-of-sale (POS) machines for retail, or even machines designed to build a car or brew beer. That said, the more work processes and support become automated, the more workers will need to develop skills to work across digital domains. The upside is that having better access to tools and support resources at scale is driving improved efficiency, employee engagement, and employee retention. These in turn can improve productivity and bottom-line results.

Why Act Now?

To remain competitive organizations must adopt more automated means of working across boundaries of time and space, effectively enabling workers onsite to collaborate with and gain support from those who are not. Whether working from a factory floor or a medical facility or simply trying to diagnose and repair a household product, the new norm is to receive support services remotely, so clients experience the least amount of disruption. As embedded devices across industries become more complex and more ubiquitous, organizations will need to up the ante in providing appropriately flexible support models.

Across industries, employee churn has been an issue for manufacturing, food and beverage, retail, healthcare, and many other industries. Recently, organizations with frontline workers have been investing more heavily in employee experience (EX) to counter high attrition. Flexible scheduling options and upskilling are key to employee retention, as is offering improved IT support. These measures, along with adoption of HR-oriented changes and automation technologies, focus on employee engagement and productivity. In the case of manufacturing, 51% of leaders surveyed indicate they will deploy metrics dedicated to supporting employee engagement through 2024. For retail, hospitality, and wholesale, that number is 47%.

Investments in employee experience, support, and productivity have a demonstrable downstream impact on customer satisfaction. IDC recently surveyed IT and business leaders across industries and found that 30% of respondents have identified some positive impacts between employee experience and customer experience (CX), while 31% have data to prove that EX positively impacts CX. Of course, these figures vary by industry. Leaders in manufacturing were more apt to have identified EX/CX impacts (36%), while organizations in retail, hospitality, and wholesale were further along in proving the positive impact of EX on CX.

Trends

When asked which work practices and technology investments are most relevant to their organization's business growth in the face of current market disruptions (e.g., economy, inflation, digital skills shortages, layoffs), 48% of manufacturing leaders said investments in cloud-based connectivity and collaboration, followed by investments in automation (42%) including GenAI. For retail, hospitality, and wholesale leaders, the top investments for business growth were skills (47%) and flexible work models (39%).

When asked, given current labor shortages, how much investment in IT support services manufacturing organizations were planning to make into 2024, 29% of leaders said they would increase spending on external IT support services and another 29% said they would increase spending toward automation of internal processes. For retail, hospitality, and

wholesale organizations, a quarter of respondents said they would increase spending on external IT support services and 23% said they would increase spending on automation of internal processes.

Into 2024, 39% of manufacturing leaders say they will be selectively deploying additional automation tech for specific departments and projects compared with 40% in retail, hospitality, and wholesale. When considering piloting additional automation tech to determine best use cases for business efficiency, 30% of manufacturing leaders said they would be doing this over the next 18 months — 7% higher than their counterparts in retail, hospitality, and wholesale.

For frontline workers, manufacturing leaders report the tech offerings best suited to improve employee engagement and business results include skills development (43%), communication and collaboration tools (41%), IT support tech and services that help keep operations running (38%), and security tools and device management technologies (35%).

When asked what technologies and programs dedicated to employee engagement would be deployed in the next 18 months, 41% of retail, hospitality, and wholesale leaders pointed to intelligent digital workspace technologies to support employees getting access to the people, tools, data, and support they needed to work (source: IDC's *Worldwide Future of Work [FoW] Survey*, April 2023).

Retail, hospitality, and wholesale leaders (32%) and manufacturing leaders (24%) pointed to customer support and frontline workers as being most impacted by the current business environment (economy, skills shortages, employee layoffs, etc.). For 61% of manufacturing organizations, work is primarily conducted in office (three or more days a week). For retail, hospitality, and wholesale, the percentage is slightly higher at 63% (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey*, Wave 5, June 2023).

Benefits

Time to resolve equipment challenges is greatly shortened so challenges and questions are resolved quickly. Consider how retail and hospitality workers can access the data they need across the spectrum of point of sale to customer data to iPad when helping clients receive the service they require. Immediate remote support from any location shortens downtime so help desk support can reach out to workers who are traveling, in the field, or working remotely.

End users can resume work quickly and focus on client support. In turn, fulfilling client engagement can reduce employee churn. In addition, customer/client satisfaction is not compromised by equipment malfunctions or delays in service when end users across industries can quickly assess and remediate equipment failure using AR/VR-enabled remote support.

Employees can also remain productive and improve support and digital skills, such as with call center workers who need to gain access to patient, student, and/or client records across multiple systems.

Ultimately, profitability increases based on smoother operations, lower employee churn, and improved customer satisfaction.

Considerations

Employees fear that automation will replace jobs — employers need to reassure them that more automated ways of working represent an opportunity for career growth and job security, in addition to making meaningful immediate impact on business results. For organizations, many are still wary of offering device access in an era where endpoint

security is paramount to enabling more flexible and efficient ways of working. Finally, the cost and time for deployment need to be weighed against the cost of not enabling remote support and compromising productivity and client satisfaction.

Conclusion

In an era in history when market disruptions from economic, climate, and political concerns are common, OEMs need to be prepared to address equipment support as quickly and efficiently as possible. Remote support and team collaboration are key factors in ensuring rapid diagnosis and repair of equipment that can be essential to saving time, money, or even lives in the case of medical devices. The ability to offer dedicated device management, automation, and overall support to frontline workers across industries is an imperative to driving local and global business results.

About the Analyst



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Amy Loomis is research vice president for IDC's worldwide Future of Work market research service. In this role, Ms. Loomis covers the growing influence of technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, and intelligent process automation in changing the nature of work. Her research looks at how these technologies influence workers' skills and behaviors, organizational culture, and worker experience and how the workspace itself is enabling the future enterprise.

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