

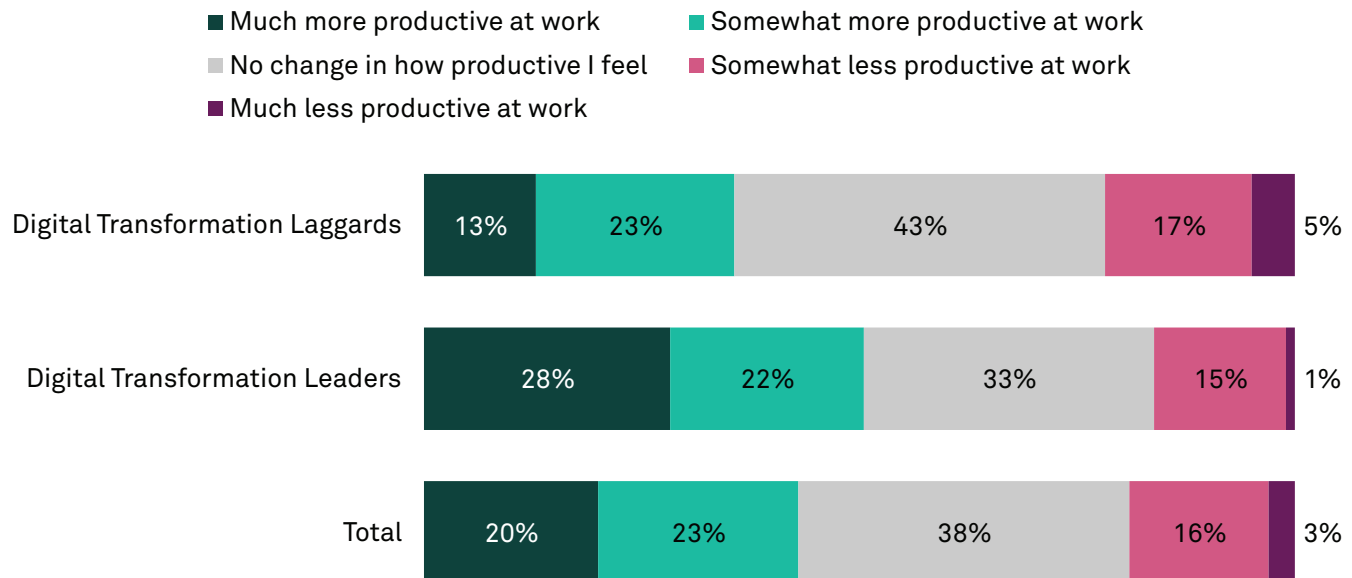
Enabling Workforce Productivity and Collaboration for the Hybrid Workforce

The 451 Take

It has been 16 months since the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, and organizations still face uncertain conditions. A fourth wave of the virus is leading many companies to reconsider their return-to-office plans, and some regions are reinstating lockdown measures. Despite the ongoing conditions imposed by COVID-19, key data points from a May-June 451 Research report¹ show that the pandemic has already resulted in permanent changes.

Many organizations have undergone significant, fundamental changes to their ways of working, IT business operations and revenue-generation efforts in the past year as a result of the pandemic. Nearly all respondents (93%) reported that their ways of working have been at least slightly transformed since the beginning of 2020, with 42% indicating significant transformation. Among those organizations that reported a significant transformation, most expect to be fundamentally different going forward in that they are significantly more reliant on remote work (75%), significantly more reliant on technology for internal collaboration (69%) and significantly less reliant on business travel (58%).

Employees Working for Digital Transformation Leaders Felt More Productive During the Lockdown



Q: Do you feel more productive or less productive at work since the start of the coronavirus pandemic?

Base: All respondents (n=941)

Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration: Work Execution Goals & Challenges 2021

This scenario has broad implications for workforce productivity and collaboration. Our VoTE Coronavirus Flash Survey (March 2020) found that a major concern in the early days of the outbreak was the impact that remote work might have on employee productivity. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of survey respondents experienced (40%) or expected to experience (24%) a reduction in employee productivity as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. One year later, our research paints a different picture. In a survey fielded in April², 43% of respondents felt more productive during the lockdown period, and 39% reported that they did not experience a change in their productivity. In contrast, only 19% said they felt less productive.

1. 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Digital Pulse, Business Reinvention & Transformation 2021

2. 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Work Execution Goals & Challenges 2021

Unsurprisingly, those respondents working for organizations that self-identified as digital transformation leaders (organizations that have a formal strategy and are actively digitizing business processes and technologies) reported feeling more productive than their counterparts in organizations that self-identified as digital transformation laggards (those that do not currently have a formal digital transformation strategy), as shown in the figure above. These data points suggest that digital transformation initiatives can be instrumental in giving organizations a head start in the transition to a hybrid work model.

Business Impact

Emergence of the hybrid work model. Given the uncertainty in the ongoing conditions imposed by COVID-19 and with lockdown measures being reinstated in some regions, the conversation has shifted to the hybrid work model. This transition to combining in-office with remote work adds a new level of complexity and could prove to be just as disruptive as the shift to remote work in the early days of the pandemic.

Insights from the lockdown period. Our research shows that supporting remote collaboration over an extended time – as opposed to some employees occasionally working remotely – creates numerous cultural, operational and technical challenges. The remote work experience gained during the lockdown period can help with the transition to a hybrid work model.

Key challenges for remote workers became increasingly evident as the lockdown was extended from a few months to more than a year. Our research³ found that the top challenges cited by employees working remotely during the lockdown period include focusing on their work and not being distracted (26%), being 'on the same page' as their colleagues (23%) and having the right workflows to be effective (19%).

Communications and collaboration, which emerged as a critical component for business continuity during the COVID-19 lockdown period, will remain a central component in the transition to a hybrid work model. However, this will require a different approach. Our research shows that several key capabilities are growing increasingly relevant for the hybrid workplace, including asynchronous team collaboration, communications-enabled workflows, low-code/no-code automation, integrations to productivity tools and workforce analytics.

Looking Ahead

Recent events such as the surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant have resulted in several regions retracting or placing the phase-out of lockdown conditions on hold, which has led many organizations – including leading tech companies – to delay their return-to-office plans. These factors are accelerating the emergence of the hybrid work model.

The opportunity to implement new work styles could have a significant impact on workforce productivity. Our research shows that employees can be equally (or more) productive when working remotely. Furthermore, recent survey data⁴ indicates a continued preference from HR professionals toward remote work and flexible-hour initiatives. On the employee side, when asked what workplace changes in the past year have had the most positive impact, 45% of respondents cited the ability to work remotely.

Organizations should not view the hybrid work model simply as a continuation of remote work, but the experience they gained during the COVID-19 lockdown could provide relevant insights for the transition. To effectively support the shift to a hybrid work model, organizations will need to align communications and collaboration with other tools to provide better visibility into work, engagement, accountability, governance and compliance. More importantly, we believe this transition presents a valuable opportunity for a broader organizational transformation that can lead to new ways of working.

3. 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Work Execution Goals & Challenges 2021

4. 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Employee Lifecycle & HR 2021