Mitel®



The Convenience Gap

Where organizations can bring everyday communication back inside the stack

97% of North American workers call their communication tools effective.
Yet 82% still route work through channels the organization doesn't manage.

Based on The State of Workforce Communication, 2026.
2,000 respondents across 5 markets.

Introduction

Workers like the tools built by leaders, but are using other channels anyway

IT and communications leaders across North America have spent years with a clear mandate: modernize the stack, keep workers productive, and protect the organization while doing it. According to the measures workers care about, North America has largely delivered. 80% of workers find communication policies clear, and 44% say they are actively consulted on tool decisions.

This briefing draws on The State of Workforce Communication, a five-market, 2,000-respondent study of workforce communication, to explain why that progress sits alongside the highest shadow IT rate in the study.

The central finding is that North American workers like their approved tools and yet still route a large share of everyday communication through personal phones and consumer apps, led by personal calls (58%) and texts or messaging apps like WhatsApp (55%). Convenience, speed and device access drive this choice, and it's one that presents real exposure for the organization.

AT A GLANCE

82%
use a non-approved channel for work, the highest of the five markets studied (vs. Europe: 74%).

97%
call their communication tools effective.

58%
make personal phone calls for work (vs. Europe: 43%).

81%
turn to voice when something needs to happen fast.

26 points
separate IT leaders (59%) and workers (33%) on whether AI use is supported "very well." Both groups rate support higher than in Europe (48% and 29% respectively).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The approved stack works, but personal phones work faster

North American organizations are doing much of what is recommended by market-driven best practices: hybrid infrastructure at 95% adoption, workers who rate their tools as effective, and frequent disruptions running 8 to 12 points below Europe on most issues. By the usual measures of a modernization program, that is a success story.

Alongside this story runs a second narrative driven by an unofficial stack. 82% of North American workers use non-approved channels for work, led by personal phone calls (58%) and texts (55%). They choose these channels because they are faster (53%) and closer to hand (36% say a work device is unavailable when they need it).

Satisfied workers still take the fastest route, and the fastest route is often their own phone.

That combination highlights a convenience problem: whether the approved stack is the fastest path in the moment, on the device already in the worker's pocket. It also shows up in governance: 9% of North American IT leaders report no formal policy on unapproved channels (Europe: 2%), and 52% of workers who use AI are mixing in public or free tools.

This briefing lays out what the study found among 500 North American respondents, based on direct signals from workers across the region.



1 Satisfied workers, busy side channels.

KEY METRICS

37%
call their tools "very effective" (Europe: 33%).

44%
say they are actively consulted on tool decisions (Europe: 33%).

33%
use non-approved channels several times a week or more.

North America's satisfaction signals are strong. Its workers feel less pressure to "make it work" (53% vs 66% in Europe), find communication policies clear (80% vs 72%), and report fewer frequent disruptions from poor connection quality (25% vs 37%) and restrictive rules (21% vs 32%).

The same workers post the highest non-approved channel use in the study, at 82% (UK 71%, Germany 75%, France 77%). Their use is broad and casual: 48% reach for these channels occasionally or rarely (Europe: 35%), and 33% do so several times a week or more. Shadow IT in North America is a widespread convenience habit spread across most of the workforce.

Go deeper in the full report: how frontline and desk workers experience disruption differently across geographies, and how an average of seven channels per worker plays out by role.



2 The shadow stack lives on personal phones, and governance has room to grow.

KEY METRICS

58%
make personal phone calls for work and 55% use SMS, iMessage or WhatsApp (Europe: 43% and 42%).

59%
of IT leaders prohibit or discourage non-approved channels (Europe: 71%).

52%
of AI users rely on public or free AI tools at least some of the time.

The unofficial stack in North America is the device workers already carry. 58% reach work tools from a personal smartphone (Europe: 47%). This is generally driven by practicality: personal channels are faster or easier (53%), a work device is unavailable when needed (36%), and personal channels give easier access to the apps they need (31%).

Governance is lighter than in Europe. 9% of North American IT leaders report no formal policy on unapproved channels (Europe: 2%), and they rate the risk lower: 83–88% see added exposure across seven risk areas, against 92–96% in Europe.

AI adds to the same exposure. North American workers are confident AI users, with 93% comfortable using it and 55% using it several times a week or more. Half of them mix in public or free tools, which puts the next wave of shadow IT on the same personal devices.

Go deeper in the full report: the seven risk areas IT leaders tie to unapproved channels, and why frontline workers use them more than twice as often as desk workers.



3 IT leaders see the gap more clearly than workers do.

KEY METRICS

33%
of IT leaders say reliability needs significant improvement (Europe: 23%).

36%
say the same of security (Europe: 23%).

39 points
separate IT leaders (83%) and workers (44%) on whether workers are actively consulted.

North American IT leaders are among the most self-critical in the study. Across eight areas, from security to ease of use, they see 17 to 28 points more need for improvement than the workers they serve. Security shows the widest spread: 71% of IT leaders want improvement there, against 43% of workers.

This self-awareness is an asset. 45% of North American IT leaders strongly agree that pressure to modernize is growing (Europe: 33%), and they already lean on partners more than European peers, outsourcing integration with industry systems (45% vs 26%) and incident management (41% vs 28%).

Attention still tends to spike with events. 92% call communication tools strategically critical at all times, yet 70% say the tools are only treated as critical when a major disruption hits (Europe: 61%). Pairing that urgency with a steady improvement plan turns crisis attention into lasting progress.

Go deeper in the full report: how hybrid deployment gives IT control and flexibility together, and where IT and worker improvement priorities diverge by role.



4 When it's urgent, it's voice, and voice often runs on a personal phone.

KEY METRICS

81%
turn to voice when rapid action is needed.

58%
use personal phone calls for work, the top non-approved channel.

19%
prefer emergency or mass notification in high-stakes moments (Europe: 11%).

Voice is the channel North American workers trust under pressure. It leads every other option for urgent situations (42%), and 38% strongly agree they use it first when something needs rapid action. Messaging takes over for routine coordination (55%).

The difference is in how that voice traffic travels. The most common unapproved channel in North America is a personal phone call, which places the region's most urgent conversations on unmanaged devices, outside call records and outside the organization's reach.

North America also leans on emergency and mass notification more than any other market: 14% prefer it for time-critical situations (Europe: 8%). Together, these signals describe a workforce asking for fast, mobile, voice-first communication, with the organization's protection built in.

Go deeper in the full report: which channels workers prefer for routine and urgent situations, and how AI comfort, support and concerns compare across roles.





In their words

"The carrying of a work cell phone that is large and heavy in a job where we are constantly up and about. Everyone carries their personal phone. I wish they could just be encrypted and have the programs added."
Healthcare worker, North America

"The desk phone obviously is only good if you are physically at your desk, but the company does not provide cell phones to all employees. It makes communication inconvenient when out on the shop floor."
Manufacturing worker, North America

"We currently use WhatsApp for communication with other technicians, but most techs do not respond or have notifications turned off so I almost always have to resort to calling techs individually."
Worker coordinating field technicians, North America

"They can be slow or spotty when driving in dead zones. Sometimes messages get missed or phone calls drop."
Healthcare worker, North America

WHY IT MATTERS

The device North American workers trust most is already in their pocket. When approved, secure communication lives on that same device and connects as fast as a personal call, workers choose it by default, and the organization regains visibility over its most urgent conversations with customers, patients and colleagues.

Where does your organization stand?

Five questions, benchmarked against North American peers. Work through them with your team, then use the full report to compare your answers by sector and role.

1. **Do your people make work calls from personal phones?** 58% of North American workers do.
2. **Can workers reach approved calling and messaging on the device they carry?** 58% already reach work tools from a personal smartphone.
3. **Does your organization have a formal policy on unapproved channels and AI tools?** 9% of North American IT leaders report no formal policy on unapproved channels, and 52% of workers who use AI mix in public or free tools.
4. **How much of your urgent communication runs on managed voice?** 81% of workers turn to voice when speed matters.
5. **Would your workers say they are actively consulted on tool decisions?** 44% of North American workers say yes, against 83% of IT leaders who believe they are.

About this research

Findings are drawn from The State of Workforce Communication, a study of 2,000 IT decision-makers, desk workers and frontline workers across the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany and France, conducted by Vanson Bourne on behalf of Mitel in 2026.

The North American findings reflect respondents from the United States and Canada within the full study (n=500: 150 IT decision-makers and 350 desk and frontline workers). Comparisons to Europe combine the UK, Germany and France (n=1,500). Verbatim quotes come from North American worker respondents, lightly edited for spelling.

See the full picture behind the convenience gap.

Read The State of Workforce Communication in the AI Era, the full 2,000-respondent report spanning five markets, every sector and the role-by-role detail behind these findings.

READ THE FULL REPORT

Ready to act on your answers?

Talk with a Mitel specialist about bringing voice, messaging and mobile communication onto the devices your people already carry, with the governance your organization needs.

TALK TO AN EXPERT

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