Tackling the Modern Workplace by the Numbers

DATA WILL GUIDE ORGANIZATIONS TO ADDRESS HYBRID MEETINGS
AND UNLOCK COLLABORATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Presented by **CRESTRON®**

Introduction

The last two years have created a host of new workplace variables ranging from the Great Resignation to the Great Migration. The result includes a mix of unfamiliar faces and teammates that aren't a cubicle over but instead miles apart. This is a driving force in the modern workplace where organizations have yet to formalize hybrid work policies, and employees are still trying to adapt to a work environment where they could be interacting with colleagues, in-person or through a screen, on any given day.

The data resoundingly indicates it is time to overcome hybrid work challenges to ensure people feel connected to both the company's purpose and each other. Signals suggest that in just a few years, the way employees work, including where, when, why, and with whom, will only closely resemble the way it stands today. It is time to make work work for everyone.

How? Stop winging it. Although workforce models vary widely across organizations, employers and employees value in-person collaboration and synchronous work equally. From desk workers to upper management, people agree there is no point in a meeting if that meeting is not productive. This results in all meetings being of high value, and the cost of technology failures and human disruption is a burden at all levels. Meetings must be purposeful, collaborative, and productive to keep participants engaged regardless of where team members are working. As data shows across the report, every week over 80% of employees have meetings that include at least one remote participant. This has changed the needs of all participants in hybrid meetings, and now is the time to make all scenarios work.

In partnership with Crestron, SMG surveyed more than 800 mid-level employees and more than 500 IT leaders for their perspectives on the hybrid workplace. This report explores employee behaviors and preferences in a hybrid workplace, the tools and solutions they are currently lacking, and what employers are (and could be) doing to enable effective collaboration remotely and in-office.[1]

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[1] See Appendix for complete demographic information.

Key Findings

1. **Hybrid meetings have created distinctive complexities** for IT managers and employees interacting with collaborative technologies, regardless of where they are working. There's **room for improvement** in current collaborative technologies offered to employees, and signs show that IT teams are taking steps to invest and experiment with innovative technologies such as intelligent video.

2. People can no longer assume everyone works from home; **meetings must be approached as always hybrid**. Across all respondents, 60% said at least half of their meetings involve a remote participant, while 30% said all their meetings include a remote participant. If you host a mix of team members, partners, or vendors, and just one person is remote, then the entire dynamic of that meeting has changed.

3. All meetings have become **high-value meetings**. Meeting technology was largely limited to executive conference rooms and training spaces. Modern work means physical workplaces must change to encourage collaboration and create equities between colleagues regardless of if the meeting is in person, virtual or hybrid.

4. We are seeing **workplace stability** for the first time in two years. Companies have largely reached a hybrid equilibrium where, on any given day, half the employees are remote, and half are in the office. The time to reinvent the hybrid meeting is now. Though the workplace environment will continue to evolve, data shows that IT teams are prioritizing flexible and scalable technology solutions that enable collaboration and platform continuity for employees wherever they work.

Demographics in Brief

The *Hybrid Meeting Collaboration* surveys received 500 responses from IT professionals at the manager level or above and 800 responses from professional or desk workers from the entry to managerial level, respectively. All data, unless otherwise sourced, is from this survey and conclusions drawn from it.[2]

FINDING 1
Complexities in the modern workplace.

The hybrid meeting realization is pushing IT leaders to address some of the more considerable complexities of the modern workplace that occur regardless of where the person is located.

When it comes to hybrid meetings, in-office and remote workers face slightly different challenges: Employees joining virtually say poor audio quality is their most common obstacle (28%). In contrast, those in the office say the most common obstacle is too many in-room distractions (25%) (Figures 1 and 2). Over 60% of survey respondents say being unable to fully see and engage with in-room or remote participants negatively affects their meeting experience. A survey from Microsoft supported this, with 43% of remote workers saying they do not feel included in meetings.[3]

Top three obstacles for virtual participants:

1. Poor audio quality

2. Poor video quality

3. Difficulty sharing content

Figure 1

Top three obstacles for in-office participants:

1. Too many in-room distractions

2. Difficulty sharing content

3. Poor video quality

Figure 2

There is an imbalance to in-person meetings if just one person joins via a video conferencing platform when the in-room technology does not support a hybrid experience on all ends of the meeting. Problems that impact productivity, collaboration, meeting equity, and successful outcomes can be significantly reduced with hybrid work policies that are designed to build a digital experience to help employees stay connected to each other, to leadership, and to the company culture no matter where they are working.

Given that less than 20% of respondents stated *all* their meeting rooms are equipped to handle hybrid collaboration, 41% say *half* or *fewer* of their rooms are properly hybrid equipped, and 39% of in-office employees state that difficulty finding an open desk or meeting space hinders them from deciding to work in the office, there are solutions that can resolve these challenges (Figure 3).

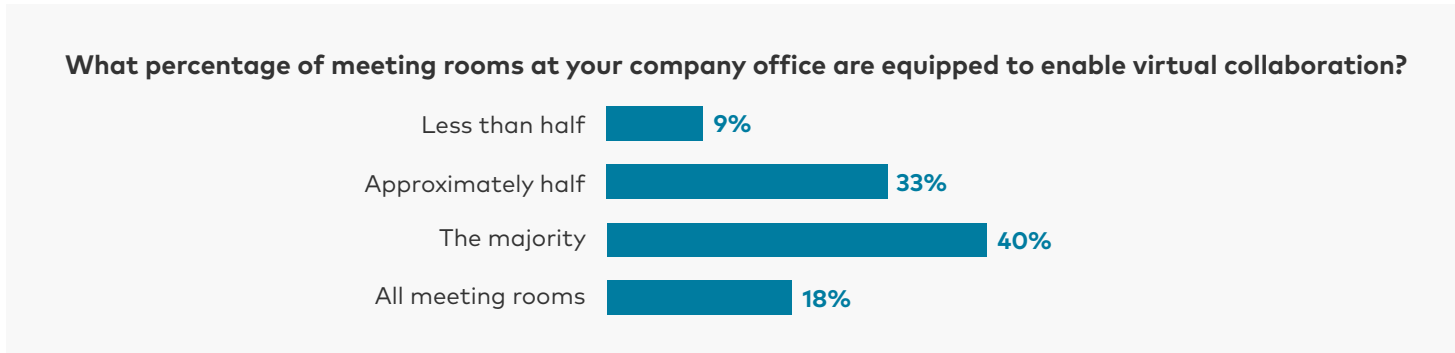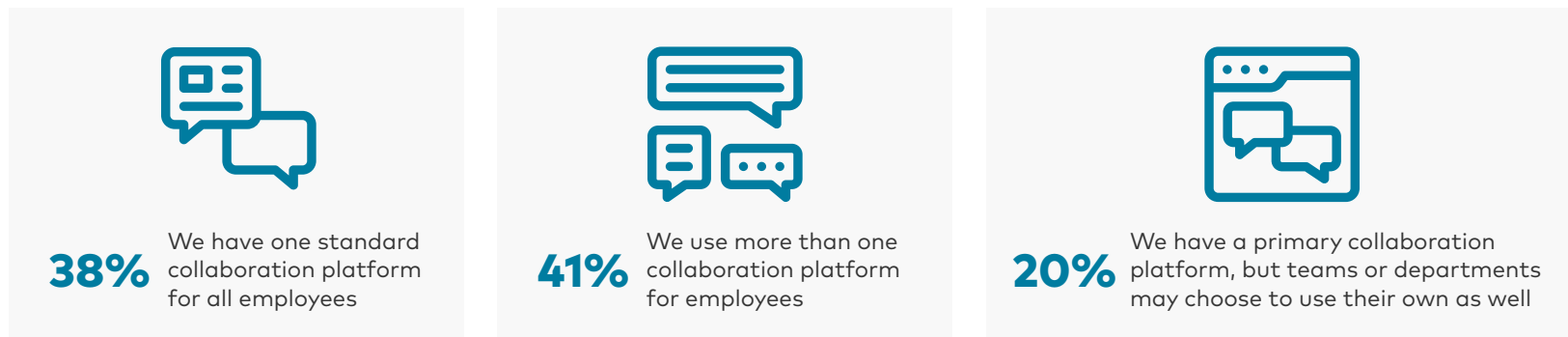[3] Microsoft. 2022. "Great Expectations: Making Hybrid Work Work." https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/

What percentage of meeting rooms at your company office are equipped to enable virtual collaboration?

Less than half	9%
Approximately half	33%
The majority	40%
All meeting rooms	18%

Figure 3

Collaborative Technologies and Opportunities for Improvement

The one nearly universal piece of hardware for remote workers is a laptop, with 89% of IT leaders reporting that they provide these to employees. Approximately 50% say they provide mobile phones, headsets, and webcams. Even fewer organizations provide conference speakers to employees.

There's also little consistency in how organizations use collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams®, Zoom Rooms™, and Slack®. Only 38% of IT leaders say their organization has a standard collaboration platform for all employees. An additional 20% say they have a standard platform, but that individual teams may also choose to use their own (Figure 4). The use of multiple platforms is impacting cross-department collaboration by increasing barriers to seamless work transitions. Employees have shared that troubleshooting increases when they switch from on-campus to offsite, and IT managers have asserted the same. Company-wide platform policies that transfer from remote to in-office work areas will bring relief.

Which statement best describes how your organization uses collaboration platforms (Zoom Rooms, Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc.)? [4]

38% We have one standard collaboration platform for all employees

41% We use more than one collaboration platform for employees

20% We have a primary collaboration platform, but teams or departments may choose to use their own as well

[4] *Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.*

Figure 4

Another emerging solution of interest is "Intelligent Video." Intelligent video integrates video technology and analytics software that can be used for various purposes, such as tracking movements or events. In the context of hybrid meetings, it could improve meeting participation and promote more natural conversations between remote and in-person participants. According to the survey, 63% of IT leaders said they're actively looking for ways to add value from these solutions (Figure 5).

What is your position on the value that solutions like Intelligent Video could bring to virtual meetings?

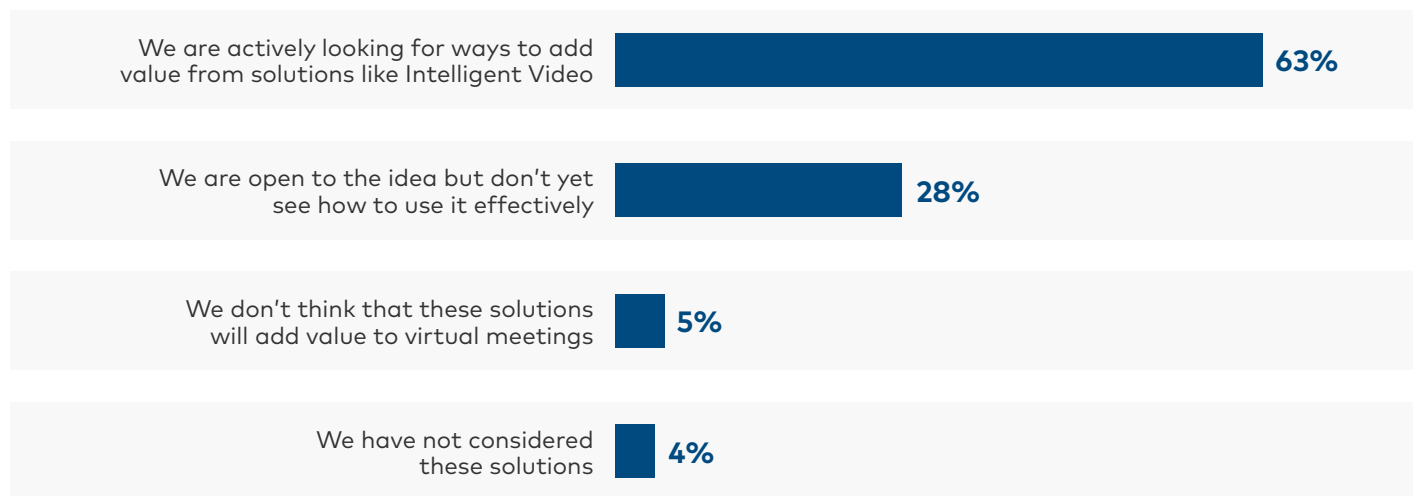| Response	Percentage
We are actively looking for ways to add value from solutions like Intelligent Video	63%
We are open to the idea but don't yet see how to use it effectively	28%
We don't think that these solutions will add value to virtual meetings	5%
We have not considered these solutions	4%

Figure 5

A key usage for intelligent video could be to improve accessibility. Those who are hard-of-hearing, in particular, have been met with new challenges in the hybrid office. According to the National Institute for Deafness and Communication Disorders[5], approximately 15% of American adults (37.5 million) aged 18 or older report some trouble hearing. The return to meeting rooms has made it harder for these individuals to lip-read due to the limitations of single front-of-room cameras. Utilizing Intelligent video and multiple in-room cameras help capture participants properly and pick up non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language.
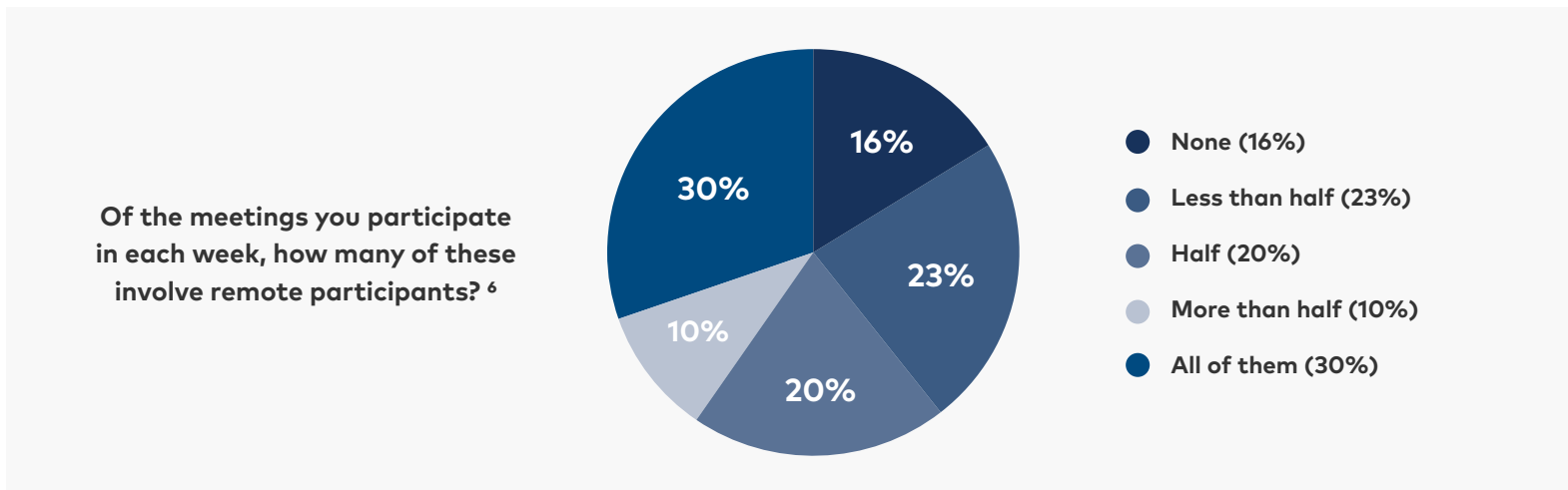
FINDING 2

Hybrid Meetings are the New Normal

Though video conferencing has expanded our capabilities to meet, it often leaves remote participants missing the big picture, while in-room participants struggle to connect with the people next to them and pay attention to the person on the monitor. The hybrid meeting problems are pervasive.

1. Remote participants want to clearly see who is in the meeting and hear every word, ensuring they feel they are equal contributors.

2. In-person attendees must juggle the ease of communication with others in the room while also including remote participants in the conversation.

Sixty percent of employee respondents said that at least half of their meetings involve remote participants; 30% said that all of them do (Figure 6).

Of the meetings you participate in each week, how many of these involve remote participants? [6]

- None (16%)
- Less than half (23%)
- Half (20%)
- More than half (10%)
- All of them (30%)

[6] *Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.*

Figure 6

As a result, everyone, in-office or remote, interacts with technology during the workday. Hybrid meetings are the new normal and a strong indicator of why many respondents are currently more interested in solutions that would make video conferencing from their desks easier than even working remotely.

FINDING 3

High-Value Meetings are Ubiquitous

According to the survey, employees have a broad preference for handling collaborative work, such as brainstorming and project planning, synchronously. The survey revealed 32% of employees prefer collaborating with colleagues virtually, while 28% say they prefer being in person, 28% said it depends on the type of meeting, and the remaining 12% had no preference. Furthermore, 44% said in-person collaboration helps them feel engaged with the company culture and encourages teamwork within and across teams. Surprisingly, 16% of employees said they don't think in-person collaboration has value (Figure 7). Not surprisingly, 88% of IT leaders report that in-person collaboration is also a priority at the organizational level (Figure 8).
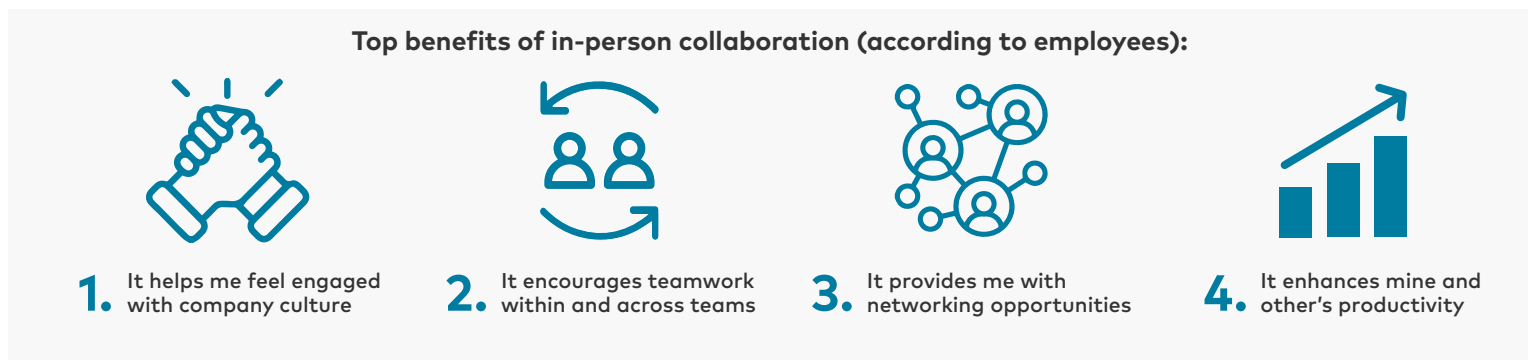
Top benefits of in-person collaboration (according to employees):

1. It helps me feel engaged with company culture

2. It encourages teamwork within and across teams

3. It provides me with networking opportunities

4. It enhances mine and other's productivity

Figure 7

How much of a priority is in-person collaboration at your organization?

47%
High priority

41%
Medium priority

10%
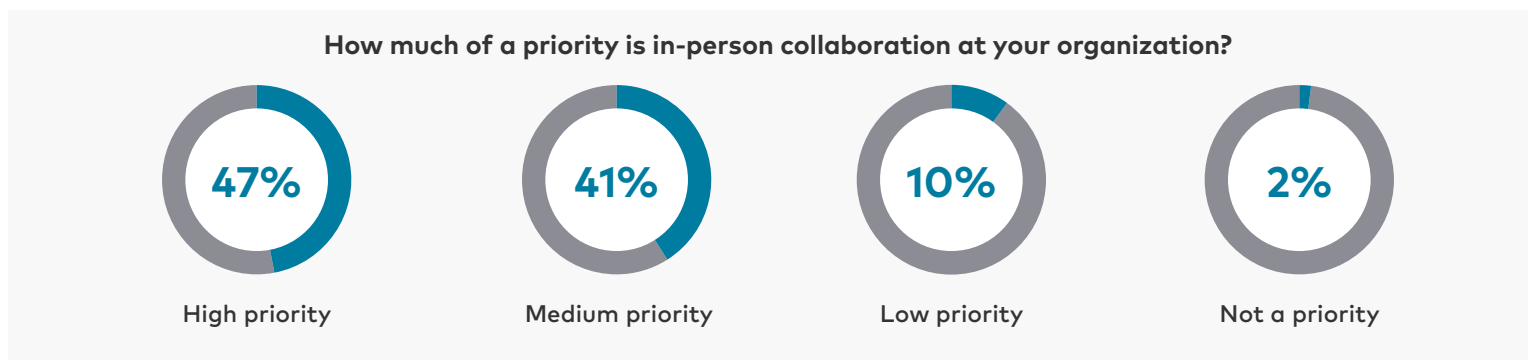Low priority

2%
Not a priority

Figure 8

9

Meetings were once a way to show how busy you were. Employees could be heard, leaders could speak, and everyone was seen. Though that remains true enough today, the pandemic revealed how much time and energy was consumed and how much time was wasted with missed connections, bad audio or video, and even technology literacy. Today, all meetings have become **high-value meetings**. Modern work means physical workplaces must change to encourage collaboration and create equities between colleagues regardless of if the meeting is in person, virtual, or hybrid.

Currently, despite the availability of meeting rooms, 47% of in-office employees are more likely to take hybrid calls individually at their desks rather than in a room with other in-office participants. Add to that the 28% who make their choice depending on the type of meeting, and that makes 75% of people who don't always meet together in-office, even when they are in the office for the same meeting but expect a remote attendee (Figure 9).

When you are taking hybrid meetings in the office with other in-office participants, which of the following is usually true?
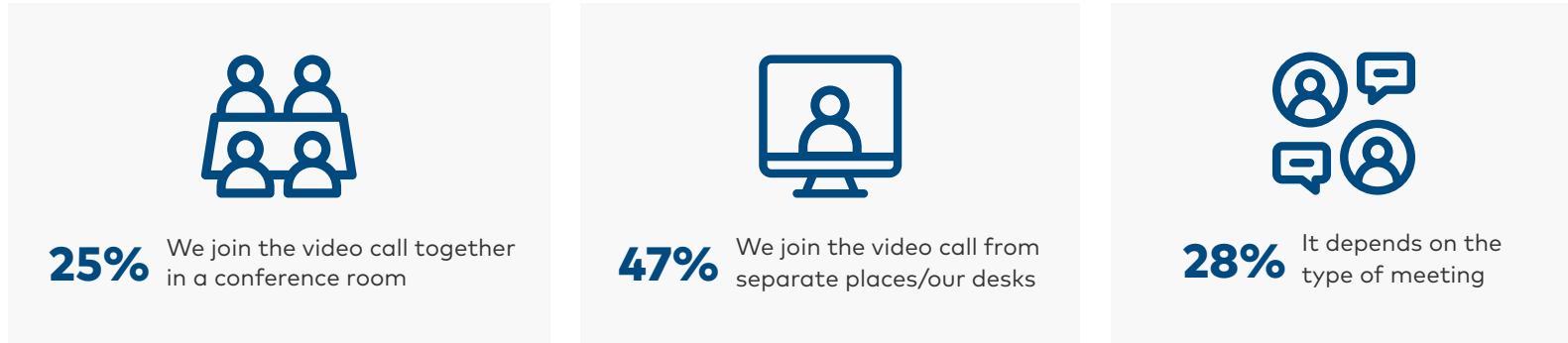
25% We join the video call together in a conference room

47% We join the video call from separate places/our desks

28% It depends on the type of meeting

Figure 9

Workplace stability means it's decision time.

Indications are that decision-makers aren't making decisions for fear of making the wrong one. However, data show that employees, managers, and IT leaders regularly have meetings with at least one person in a setting different from the rest of the group. Responses from both employees and IT leaders reflect that the rate of hybrid/remote work will remain relatively stable across the industry. For most respondents, this reflects no change from last year. For about a quarter, it's more in-office time, and for the final quarter, it's less. This reflects a relatively stable status quo where only about half of the people are in-office at any given time (Figure 10).
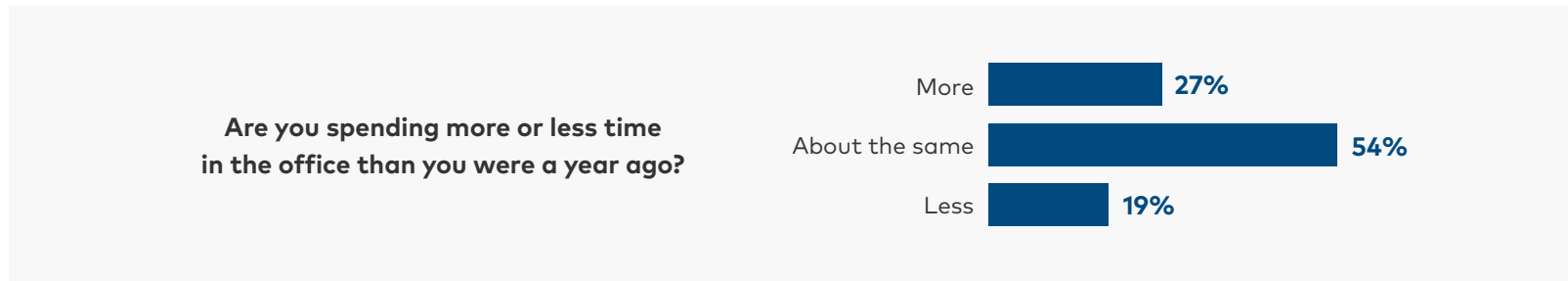
Are you spending more or less time in the office than you were a year ago?

More 27%
About the same 54%
Less 19%

Figure 10

We have reached an equilibrium; this next year could see employee experience technology stacks evolving at many organizations as they look to iterate on the hybrid experience. In fact, most IT respondents (79%) said their organization plans to update their hybrid work strategy in the next 12 months. (Figure 11).
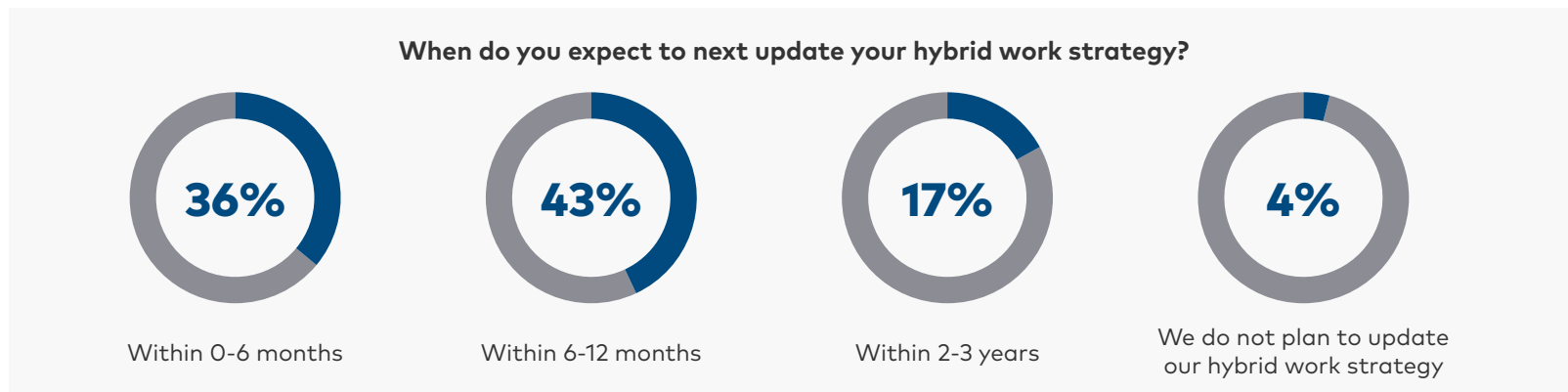
When do you expect to next update your hybrid work strategy?

36% — Within 0-6 months
43% — Within 6-12 months
17% — Within 2-3 years
4% — We do not plan to update our hybrid work strategy

Figure 11

To encourage productivity, engagement, and teamwork – the most desired outcomes of virtual collaboration cited by IT leaders – companies will have to consider not just implementing more tools, but the right ones. With nearly half (47%) of IT leaders stating they've taken steps to improve the quality of their collaboration tools, 71% said they're likely to replace their collaboration platform in the next year (Figure 12).
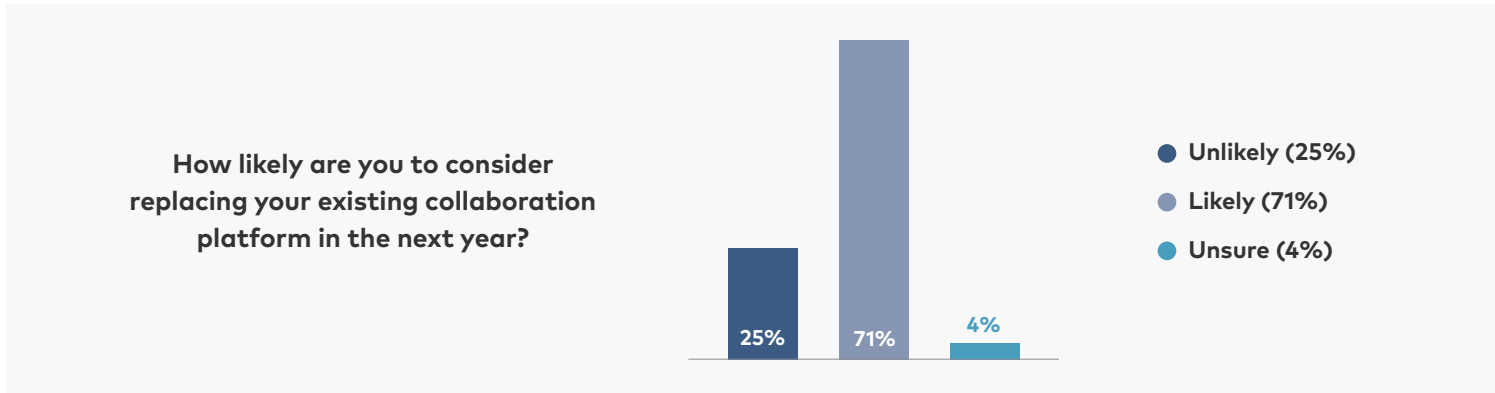
How likely are you to consider replacing your existing collaboration platform in the next year?

- Unlikely (25%)
- Likely (71%)
- Unsure (4%)

25% 71% 4%

Figure 12

Conclusion

The flip side of disruption will be reinvention.

In our modern work era, hybrid meetings are more successful when everyone is fully connected. For employees, this means an inclusive meeting experience that empowers everyone to participate rather than observe. For companies, this means creating meeting room environments that drive productivity and connectivity (both human and hardware).

Employees and leaders know that learning how to enable hybrid work will require iteration and experimentation. We are still unlearning decades of "office work." Designing a hybrid workplace will require the participation of numerous stakeholders, including design firms, furniture manufacturers, technology vendors, and IT teams to find the right collaborative technologies for their employees. In addition, to promote in-person collaboration, they'll need to invest in solutions that bring in-person employees back into meeting rooms without leaving remote employees behind.

The disruption to the workplace can be an opportunity. The digital transformation of the workplace is an opportunity for reinvention and acceleration that will change everything we know to be true about work.

Appendix

Demographics

Name of survey
Hybrid Workplace Collaboration Employee Survey

Survey date
Survey conducted in August of 2022

Number of respondents
835

Respondent level[7]
Entry Level: 23%
Individual Contributor: 33%
Manager: 43%

Type of work performed
Professional, desk, clerical, managerial, or
administrative labor: 100%

Represented industries[8]
Healthcare: 16%
Business and Professional Services: 9%
Retail: 8%
Finance and Insurance: 7%
Banking: 5%

Name of survey
Hybrid Workplace Collaboration Administrators Survey

Survey date
Survey conducted in August of 2022

Number of respondents
502

Respondent department
Information Technology (IT): 100%

Respondent level
Manager: 43%
Director and above: 57%

Organization size
999 or less: 34%
1,000 to 4,999: 34%
5,000 or more: 32%

Represented industries[9]
Information Services and Data Processing: 22%
Software: 11%
Business and Professional Services: 10%
Banking: 7%
Finance and Insurance: 7%

[7] *Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.*

[8] *All other industries make up less than 5% of respondents.*

[9] *All other industries make up less than 5% of respondents.*

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