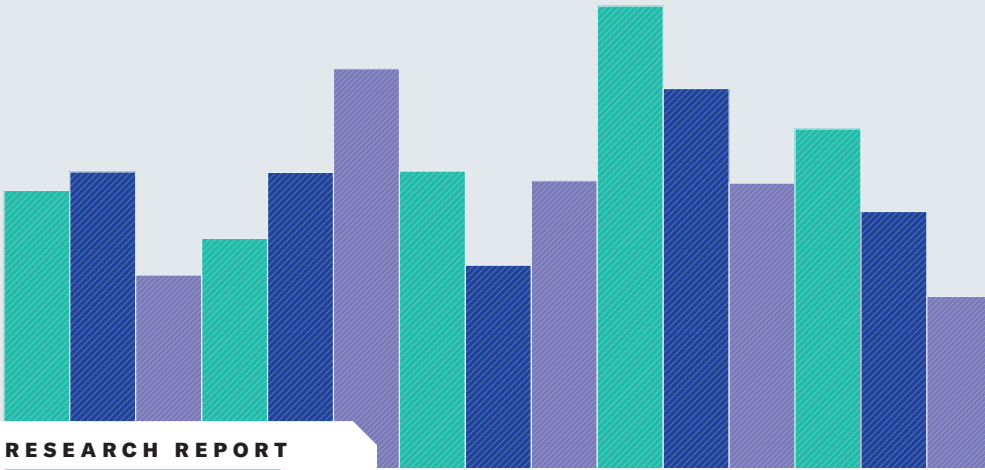




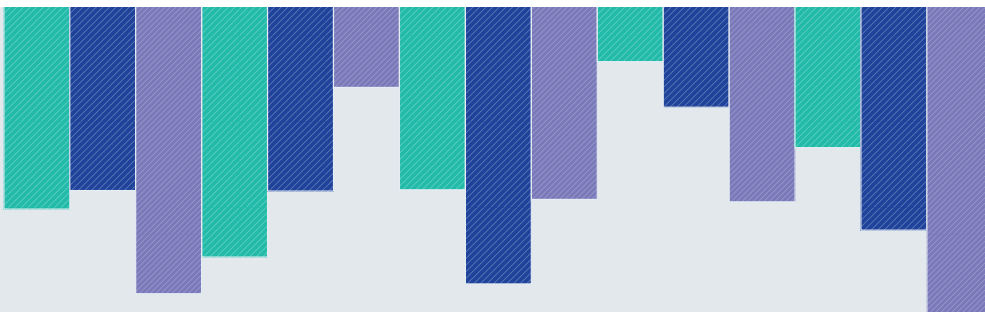
**Harvard
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Review**

ANALYTIC SERVICES



RESEARCH REPORT

Improving Employee and Customer Experiences Through Workflow Digitisation



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The best customer experience starts with a great employee experience.

When employees have the support and technology needed to do their best work, they create customer experiences that are fluid, smooth and meaningful. This all starts with workflow digitisation.

Respondents in this Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey emphatically agreed: nearly 80% said digitising workflows has improved the employee experience. Even more – almost 90% – agreed that the employee experience directly impacts the customer experience.

The disruptions of the past few years have brought these issues to the forefront. Rapid technology adoption and increased demand for flexible work arrangements are just two examples of challenges that have forced organisations to transform. In today's modern workplace, seamless collaboration, automation, artificial intelligence and enhanced security are all essential for delivering amazing customer experiences.

Adobe's integrations with Microsoft apps allow employees to enjoy a fully digital and connected experience where tedious, error-prone manual document processes are automated into highly efficient

workflows. Team members and external stakeholders can collaborate in real time on PDFs, streamline the production and approval process and deliver great customer experiences more efficiently. That is because employees are not only working more smartly; they are also freeing up time for more strategic and fulfilling work. The result is a win-win for both businesses and customers.

Companies further along in their digitisation journeys are already starting to reap these benefits. Leaders create a better employee experience for remote workers with more flexibility and more effective asynchronous work. They are also seeing improved data security, regulatory compliance and data analytics throughout their workflows.

Adobe and Microsoft are excited that so many survey respondents are benefiting from the positive impact of workflow digitisation on their organisation. We celebrate and support all organisations redefining what great employee and customer experiences can be, whether they are just starting on their journey or already on their way.

Improving Employee and Customer Experiences Through Workflow Digitisation

HAVING A STRONG EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE is a top priority for many organisations today. Not only do companies that cultivate and support a strong employee experience enjoy higher productivity and engagement, they also collaborate better and realise increased customer satisfaction.

Key to a robust employee experience – and a top-notch customer experience – is digitisation, the process of converting manual or paper-based systems into digital processes and documents that can be automated and streamlined through software and technology. In June 2023, Harvard Business Review Analytic Services conducted a global survey of 508 members of the Harvard Business Review audience who are familiar with their organisation's digital workflow maturity and the tools and processes used to digitise workflows. The survey finds that 94% of respondents say that digitising workflows is important to their organisation.

These organisations are realising a range of significant business benefits, including improved efficiency, streamlined work processes, better employee access to the necessary tools and technologies and improved collaboration. The benefits of workflow digitisation also extend to customers, who are realising better experiences through processes that are simplified, efficient, automated and secure.

'Everything today is becoming digitised and re-imagined and organisations are questioning the fundamentals of their workflows, like whether there are better ways to do things and whether they are even thinking about it in the right way any more, given that the world has changed so much in the past few years,' says Dion Hinchcliffe, vice president and principal analyst at Silicon Valley-based Constellation Research, a technology research and advisory firm. 'Digitising workflows and workflow automation are fundamental to the employee experience. Among other benefits, they focus on taking the drudgery out of the day-to-day so employees can spend time on more strategic and fulfilling tasks.'

Despite these benefits, however, the survey also finds that most organisations struggle with digitisation. As organisations aim to improve their employee experience and customer experience, greater workflow digitisation and

HIGHLIGHTS



87% of respondents agree that the **employee experience** directly impacts the customer experience.

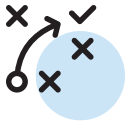


79% of respondents agree that **digitising workflows** has improved the employee experience.



72% of respondents say **digitising workflows** is very important to their organisation, while far fewer (31%) say their organisation is very effective at it.

Due to rounding, some figures in this report may not add up to 100%.



'Among other benefits, digitising workflows and workflow automation focus on taking the drudgery out of the day-to-day so employees can spend time on more strategic and fulfilling tasks,' says Dion Hinchcliffe, vice president and principal analyst at Constellation Research.

automation will be key. By rethinking, streamlining and automating these processes, organisations will not only realise efficiency benefits but also improve the employee experience through digital tools and workflows that help employees do their job better, ultimately enabling them to focus on more strategic priorities. As a result, these efforts will help create a better customer experience, too.

'The environment we are operating in today is very, very complex and dynamic,' says Nigel Guenole, director of research for the Institute of Management at Goldsmiths, University of London, citing exogenous shocks to the economy such as Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine. 'Digitising workflows is one way we can manage this external environment to be faster, more efficient and lower cost, and to have fewer errors, all while providing employees an improved experience.'

This Harvard Business Review Analytic Services research report examines the impact that digitising workflows can have on teams, as well as its effects on security and compliance, and identifies the challenges and benefits that organisations are experiencing today. This report also examines the connection between the employee experience and the customer experience and the impact that workflow automation can have on both. Finally, this report offers advice and next steps for businesses as they advance their digitisation and workflow automation initiatives.

The Evolving Employee Experience

Organisations have experienced tremendous disruption over the past few years. The Covid-19 pandemic sparked rapid technology adoption and digital transformation as businesses and employees grappled with new ways of working. Today, the employee experience is front and centre at many organisations as business leaders identify and address changing employee priorities, such as the desire for flexible work arrangements.

'The pandemic was transformational in so many ways. There is a need today to continue being highly productive, deal with expectations and do it all in the context of a technology shift that is happening faster than it has ever happened in anybody's lifetime,' says Yogesh Mishra, managing director and partner at Boston-based Boston Consulting Group (BCG). 'Enterprises and leaders need to be very thoughtful and very diligent about what they're delivering as an overall employee

value proposition and employee experience is a very critical part of it.'

Despite the employee benefits of digitisation, only 31% of the respondents to the Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey say their organisation is very effective at digitising workflows. **FIGURE 1** Among the factors affecting their success are challenges to user adoption, change management and difficulties identifying and implementing the right technology.

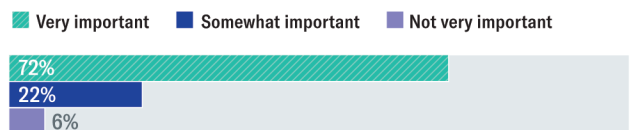
In fact, most organisations are falling short of their employee experience, digitisation and workflow automation goals. In this survey, 30% of the respondents are defined as leaders, 41% are defined as followers and 30% are defined as laggards, based on the importance they place on workflow digitisation and its effectiveness. **FIGURE 2**

Leaders are a step above followers and laggards in their employee experience, digitisation and workflow automation journeys. These businesses have created a superior employee experience for remote workers, showcasing more effective flexible work arrangements and better-enabled asynchronous work. They are closer to achieving their digital transformation goals and have a greater intention to continue digitisation efforts. These organisations also exhibit improved data

FIGURE 1

The Digitisation Disconnect

Most organisations agree that digitising workflows is very important, but few are very effective at doing it



How **important** is digitising workflows to your organisation?



How **effective** is your organisation at digitising workflows?

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023

FIGURE 2

Workflow Digitisation Categorisation

Effectiveness and prioritisation of digital workflows are categorised into three groups

How important is digitising workflows to your organisation?
How effective is your organisation at digitising workflows?



Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023

security, regulation compliance and data analytics through their digitised workflows and they credit these efforts with improving their customer experience, too.

Nonetheless, the employee experience is an area ripe for improvement. The survey finds that just 17% of respondents deem their organisation very successful at creating and supporting an improved employee experience. Overall, the majority (71%) say they are somewhat successful in creating and supporting an improved employee experience and 11% say they are not at all successful.

Challenges to Achieving an Improved Employee Experience

A number of challenges are preventing organisations from achieving an improved employee experience, including the top one – difficult breaking down company silos (51%). **FIGURE 3**

Jan Van Mieghem, professor of operations and deputy dean at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, says that a lack of transparency in workflows is partly to blame. 'People understand their own workflows and processes, but they don't necessarily understand how other

FIGURE 3

Employee Experience Challenges

Organisations are facing a variety of challenges that impact the employee experience

Which employee experience challenges is your organisation facing?
Select all that apply.



Not shown: 4% Don't know, 2% None of the above

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023

organisations operate. They are functional experts but don't necessarily have a good view of the end-to-end process,' he says. The survey finds that breaking down company silos is a particular challenge for organisations defined as laggards (58%) and followers (53%), compared to leaders (41%).

Content silos greatly impact the employee experience, says Holly Muscolino, group vice president of content strategies and the future of work at Needham, Mass.-based IDC, a global market intelligence firm. 'Organisations are dealing with a massive amount of siloed content on systems that are not

integrated in a unified way,' she says. 'Taking time to find things is a massive waste of time and erodes the employee experience.'

Organisations are also contending with decisions to return to the office, says Melissa Jezior, president and CEO of Eagle Hill Consulting, an Arlington, Va.-based business management consulting firm. 'There is a concern among leadership over whether employees are as productive at home compared to in the office and how connected they actually are to the organisation compared to pre-Covid,' she says. 'This is creating major tension in companies – there is a lot of push and pull between what the organisations are mandating and what employees actually want.'

The majority of organisations are supporting flexible work arrangements. The survey finds that two-thirds (68%) agree that their organisation offers flexibility for employees to work anywhere, at any time. Leaders (81%) are more likely to agree that their organisation offers employees this flexibility, compared to followers (69%) or laggards (53%).

While many organisations have flexible work arrangements in place for now, the survey suggests that there is room for improvement in how they enable these arrangements. When asked how effective their organisation is at a variety of aspects of flexible work arrangements, only 43% say their organisation is very effective at enabling asynchronous work. Slightly more than half (51%) say their organisation is very effective at communicating via asynchronous platforms (e.g. project management software, work communication tools and email), 56% say their organisation is very effective at collaborating among remote staff and 62% say their organisation is very effective at sharing and working on documents anywhere, in real time.

Many of the reasons why more organisations are not more effective at communication, asynchronous work and collaboration in flexible work environments stem from rapid technology rollouts without proper integration during the pandemic, Jezior says. 'When they first rolled out these communication and collaboration tools, they bolted them onto the organisation, tossed them into use and just asked everyone to adhere to these new platforms,' she says. 'What they did not do is spend the time on the real practical application for incorporating these tools into a meeting setting, talking with employees about the different features and how to use them, and really adapting to it and adhering to them over time.'

This lack of strategy was cited as the top contributing factor to organisations' challenges regarding the employee experience (39%). Other factors include inadequate resources (37%), a lack of tools/technology (34%), a lack of communication (33%) and ineffective leadership (31%).

Despite the current challenges businesses are facing with regard to the employee experience, organisations agree that there are critical benefits to be achieved by improving it.

Among the most important are higher employee productivity (71%), higher employee engagement (69%), better collaboration (65%), increased customer satisfaction (47%) and lower employee turnover (47%). **FIGURE 4**

These benefits are particularly appealing to businesses given today's economic climate, BCG's Mishra says. 'Organisations are on edge because they are wondering whether a recession is coming,' he says. 'Everyone is really focused on efficiency, reducing costs and doing more with less while keeping employees happy and still delivering a great customer experience.'

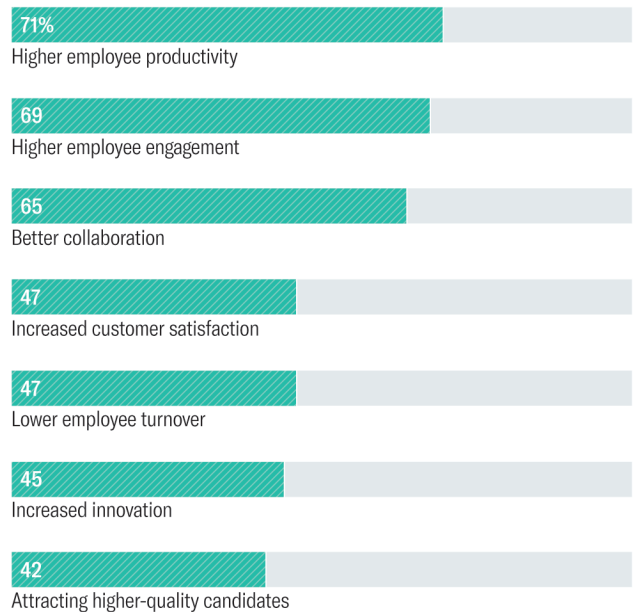
To achieve these benefits, organisations are prioritising certain aspects of the employee experience. Respondents say their organisation is most focused on improving productivity (44%), streamlining work processes (39%), improving collaboration (38%) and improving internal communication (27%). For many businesses, the path to realising these employee experience benefits is through workflow digitisation and automation.

FIGURE 4

Employee Experience Benefits

Organisations agree that there are critical benefits to be achieved by improving the employee experience

What are the business benefits of an improved employee experience that are most important to your organisation? *Select all that apply.*



Not shown: 2% Don't know, 1% Other

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023



94%

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'Everyone is really focused on efficiency, reducing costs and doing more with less while keeping employees happy and still delivering a great customer experience,' says Yogesh Mishra, managing director and partner at Boston-based Boston Consulting Group.

Where Workflow Digitisation Stands

By digitising workflows, respondents say their organisation has realised key capabilities, including better document tracking (75%); improved efficiency (73%); time savings (72%); improved document access, editing and sharing during remote work (70%); and reduced administrative tasks (66%).

Human resources is one function that is realising these capabilities from digitised processes, says Brian Delle Donne, president of Talent Tech Labs, a New York City-based independent research and advisory firm. 'HR has a number of complicated processes that have handoffs and multiple stages, such as an initiation of a new job requirement,' he says.

This process might require an approval signature from finance before being handed over to the talent acquisition team, which might require a series of additional signatures before it is approved and promoted on a jobs board, he says. 'Digitising these processes presents a huge opportunity for labour and cost savings. Not only that, but the people doing this work did not sign up to be in talent acquisition for the administrative burden that comes with how you move those things through a complex set of processes – they did so because they love recruiting.'

Organisations are realising a number of benefits as a result of digitised workflows. Respondents cite improved efficiency (76%), streamlined processes (68%), employee access to necessary tools and technologies (58%), improved employee collaboration (58%) and an improved employee experience for remote workers (53%) as benefits their organisation has achieved as a result of digitised workflows. **FIGURE 5**

Digitised workflows are also helping organisations keep data safe. While 77% of respondents agree that digital workflows help keep their organisation's company and customer data safe, leaders and followers are more likely to agree with that

statement (85% and 81%, respectively). Comparatively, 64% of laggards agree with that statement. Ensuring compliance through digitised workflows is just as important. Nearly eight in 10 (79%) agree that digital workflows enable their organisation to be compliant with regulations.

'Organisations need to safeguard their information to make sure it is used in a responsible manner and that they are following all sorts of compliance protocols,' Jezior says. 'This is a hot focus, particularly now, with all sorts of new data being leveraged in a multitude of ways. Digitising workflows helps to safeguard and protect that data so organisations are not facing any sort of risk on the back end. That can really detract from the customer experience, should they not feel you are a good steward of their data.'

Customer Experience Benefits

While digitising workflows and processes benefits businesses and employees in a number of ways, the benefits also extend to the customer experience. 'When you create infrastructure capabilities that are digital in nature, you take out a lot of grit for the employees who are interacting with these processes,' Mishra says. 'But ultimately, these processes are also touching the customers.'

In the financial sector, for example, customers who applied for mortgage loans were traditionally required to manually fill in forms and send them by post. The mortgage lender would need to input the information into a system for the underwriters to review and a decision would ultimately be sent by post back to the customer.

This process – and others like it – both was tedious for customers to complete and had a high potential for errors, IDC's Muscolino says. 'Not only is this a huge waste of time for customers, but there are just so many places where things can go wrong and the turnaround time is so slow,' she says. 'If you have this process digitised and automated, the information automatically flows into and out of systems and documents are automatically generated. The customer is happy because it is much faster and much more secure and there is much less room for error.'

Another added benefit impacting both businesses and customers is reduced expenses, Mishra says. 'Companies have operated under the mindset that a better customer experience means a higher cost, but that is not necessarily true,' he says. Mishra points to a bank that sent welcome packages by post to customers who opened new accounts. Among other things, these packages included physical copies of documents related to the customers' new accounts and while visually appealing, they were also very costly to print and send by post.

'What we actually found was that customers preferred this information to be sent digitally because many lived in apartments or rentals and would move,' Mishra says, citing

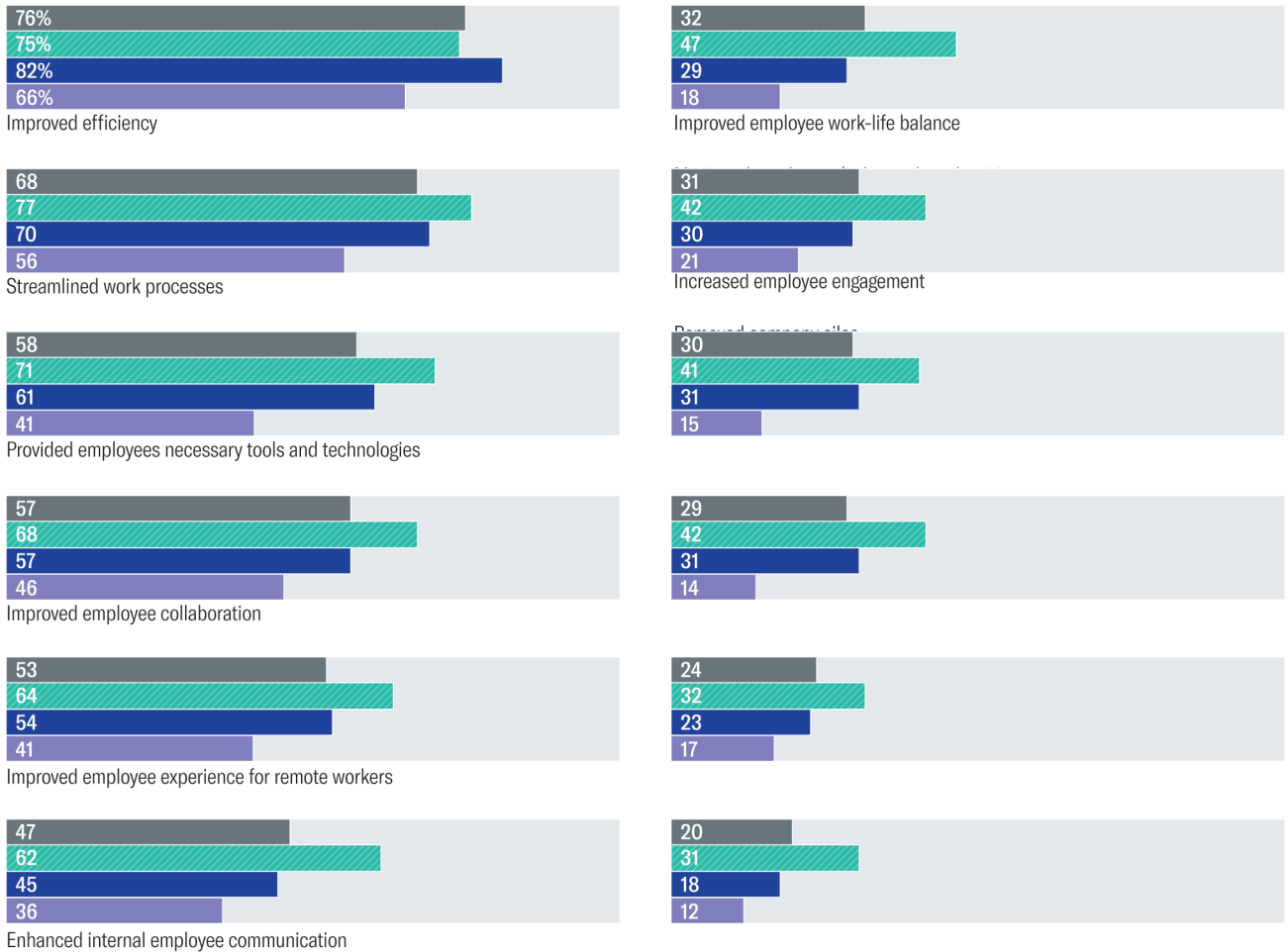
FIGURE 5

The Benefits of Digitised Workflows

Improved efficiency is the top benefit overall, while leaders are more likely to see cultural improvements like better employee communication and work-life balance

What benefits has your organisation achieved as a result of digitised workflows? *Select all that apply.*

■ All respondents (total) ■ Leaders ■ Followers ■ Laggards



Not shown: Other 1-2%, None of the above 1-2%, Don't know 1-4%, varies by segment

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023

worries about post being forwarded. 'The bank was very proud of their gold-plated document holders, but the customers did not care. By digitising the information, the banks not only saved money; they were more efficient. And the customers were happier, too, because they wanted this information available to them even after they had moved out.'

The impact that digitising workflows and processes can have on organisations and customers cannot be underestimated,

Mishra adds. 'Today you simply cannot maintain the customer experience without digitisation, both from a process perspective and from an insights perspective,' he says. 'It is getting tougher to maintain loyalty and attentiveness from customers and you need a lot of insights to be able to present the right information at the right time.'

When employees are engaged and satisfied, they are more likely to go above and beyond to meet the customer's needs

and provide exceptional service, the University of London's Guenole says. 'It becomes this virtuous cycle of when the employees are doing well, the business does better, too,' he says. This notion is well understood today: 87% of respondents agree that the employee experience directly impacts the customer experience.

The efforts that organisations are taking to digitise workflows appear to have a positive effect on both employees and customers. Nearly eight in 10 (79%) agree that digitising workflows has improved the employee experience, while 76% agree that digitising workflows has improved the customer experience. And leaders are more likely than the others to agree this is the case. **FIGURE 6**

The capabilities and benefits that organisations are realising through digitised workflows – improved efficiency, streamlined work processes, time savings and improved collaboration – all directly impact the customer, too. 'If an employee does not enjoy their job, is bogged down with time-consuming tasks, has terrible processes and does not have the tools they need, they are not going to be able to deliver the customer experience that the customer expects,' Guenole says. 'Every one of those moments is a moment of truth that has a critical, real impact on the long-term customer experience and health for the customer.'

On the flip side, undigitised workflows also can have a direct impact – albeit a poor one – on the customer experience. Among the top impacts of undigitised workflows respondents report are delayed response times (70%), increased errors/data inconsistencies (60%), inconsistent service among employees (55%) and a lack of tracking/monitoring (47%).

Leading organisations are taking the employee-customer experience connection seriously, Jezior says. 'They recognise that you have to focus on both – it is not just customers and it's not just employees,' she says. 'These organisations are treating the employee experience and the customer experience as transformational efforts within their organisation – they are truly integrating it into everything they do. It is not just a one-off survey effort.'

For example, she says, leading organisations are bridging the inner and outer loops of the customer experience. They are looking for opportunities to digitise customer feedback, pull it into the organisation for interpretation and then determine how to reorganise and develop customer-centric teams that cross-cut the customer service life cycle to improve both internally and externally. 'Finding those efficiencies through automating information, democratising that data and drawing interpretations from frontline experts is how you drive the strategy of the organisation forward,' she says.

Roadblocks to Digitisation Progress

Despite the efforts made toward digitising workflows – and despite the critical benefits and capabilities organisations stand to realise – many businesses are struggling to implement them: just 31% say they are very effective at doing so. The greatest challenge to digitising workflows for organisations is user adoption (42%), followed by change management (41%), identifying the right technology (35%), technical implementation challenges (32%) and defining a process (31%), the survey finds.

A few factors are impacting organisations' abilities to foster better user adoption of digitised workflows, Constellation Research's Hinchcliffe says. One consideration is the '9x rule,' which he says dictates that for mass adoption of something new, it has to be nine times better than what employees had before. 'This is not what we typically see in the enterprise. We usually see very incremental improvements, which workers resist, especially if they believe there is a choice in adopting it,' he says. 'Workers used to have to make do with what they were given but that is not the case today. We see that with shadow IT at an all-time high.' Shadow IT refers to IT devices, software and services outside the ownership or control of the organisation.

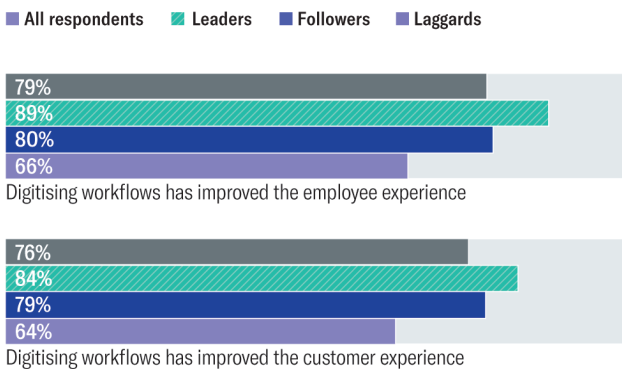
Another factor that stymies user adoption stems from the group spearheading the project, Hinchcliffe says. Often, workflow digitisation efforts are owned by IT and not the business. 'IT departments rarely have business KPIs in their remit and so their success is based on whether they rolled it out or not,' he says. 'They spend their time trying to get the system deployed and support any technical problems that occur, but they are not responsible for ensuring that it is

FIGURE 6


Digital Workflows and the EX/CX Connection

Digitising workflows has a direct effect on both the employee experience and the customer experience

Respondents who agree (strongly or somewhat) with the following statements:



Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, June 2023



'Leading organisations are treating the employee experience and the customer experience as transformational efforts within their organisation – they are truly integrating it into everything they do. It is not just a one-off survey effort.'

**Melissa Jezior, president and CEO
of Eagle Hill Consulting**

realising maximum business effectiveness. That is usually on the business.'

Having a clear understanding of the KPIs is key to ensuring that organisations don't lose sight of the actual business value that is being created, Jezior adds. 'Businesses need to think about how they are measuring the success of the digitisation of workflows and making sure that they are producing the business results that were intended.'

Another factor impacting adoption – which is also a top five challenge to digitising workflows – is difficulty defining an actual process, Jezior says. 'One of the biggest struggles is that organisations don't have a fundamental understanding of what the process is, how it operates, who is involved, who the key players are and what information is available,' she says.

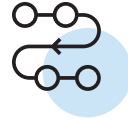
The need to understand a workflow before digitising it might seem self-evident, Northwestern University's Van Mieghem adds, but that's not always the case. 'Often, in highly professional knowledge organisations, people don't necessarily think in terms of the true workflow, or even the true customer experience,' he says. 'If the organisation is not really focused on that end-to-end perspective, digitisation becomes problematic.'

The sheer volume of data that organisations contend with in workflow digitisation is another challenge that organisations face in their technical implementations, Muscolino says. 'There is so much content in an organisation and so much unstructured data. It is not always just documents that exist on our computer or shared drives, but content and data produced by applications in a variety of systems that don't necessarily integrate in a unified way. This results in duplication, increased complexity and more security risk and makes it more challenging to comply with industry and government regulations.'

While most organisations are progressing in their workflow digitisation initiatives, many are in the early stages of automating workflows. Very few (4%) have automated all workflows, with the majority (66%) of respondents reporting their organisation has automated some, with plans to automate more.

Data challenges are preventing some organisations from pursuing more workflow automation, Hinchcliffe says. 'Some organisations just cannot get to it. If you don't have a strong data foundation, if you have low data management maturity, or if your data is locked up in spreadsheets, workflow automation just is not possible,' he says. 'If that is the case, you are spending all your time just opening the data up before you can start the actual automation.'

Other challenges are organisational, he adds. 'It is really hard to get permission to change the business. You can almost always convince your own team that you're going to do this, but the more people or teams you involve, the more time you are going to spend negotiating and getting everyone on board.'



'Often, in highly professional knowledge organisations, people don't necessarily think in terms of the true workflow, or even the true customer experience. If the organisation is not really focused on that end-to-end perspective, digitisation becomes problematic,' says Jan Van Mieghem, professor of operations and deputy dean at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

Some organisations are also contending with skills gaps, which are preventing workflow automation progress, Muscolino says. 'We are seeing a lot of buzz around low-code/no-code and the promise that employees will be able to automate their own workflows in time,' she says. 'But they will still need training and support to be successful and understand best practices around the technology. Our research shows that IT departments will continue to need the necessary automation skills to support these initiatives.'

Despite these challenges, organisations that have embarked on workflow automation are realising important benefits. Among the top benefits respondents say their organisation has realised are streamlined processes (64%), improved productivity (63%), easier access to information/documents (60%) and reduced errors (56%). Reduced errors is a benefit that more leaders than laggards are experiencing (69% vs. 49%).

HR is one function with many process-based workflows suitable for automation, Delle Donne of Talent Tech Labs says. He points to the offer letter process, which he says is complicated for businesses because of the many rules and requirements, depending on the state, job type, whether the position is represented in collective bargaining or whether the individuals are protected by anti-discrimination laws.

'There is a lot that goes into crafting an offer letter and getting it back signed, so it is a great area for digitisation and automation,' he says. 'And to the extent that you are able to reduce the time a recruiter or hiring manager spends on filling in these forms, making sure they are filed compliantly and

chasing down signatures, the better their experience becomes because their time is better spent elsewhere.'

Only about a third of respondents (32%) say their organisation uses advanced digital document workflows. These advanced workflows often involve the use of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and robotic process automation (RPA). Interestingly, 55% of leaders are using advanced digital document workflows, whereas only 30% of followers and 14% of laggards are.

In practice, some organisations are using generative AI in advanced digital document workflows to analyse and summarise key points in long contracts or documents, but it is still early days, Muscolino says. She also notes the evolution of scanning and capture: 'We've seen RPA applications integrate intelligent document processing solutions to automatically extract unstructured data, validate it and then hand it to a downstream database or application,' she says. 'It is becoming more and more intelligent and requiring less exception handling. You can imagine how compelling that is in terms of streamlining workflows, reducing time, reducing errors and improving experience.'

In fact, respondents whose organisations use advanced digital document workflows say improved productivity (64%) and reduced errors (58%) are the top two benefits their organisation is realising through this process. Respondents also cite streamlined processes (57%), easier access to information/documents (46%) and a reduced workload (45%).

The Path Forward in Workflow Digitisation

Organisations are not content with the progress they've made on workflow digitisation initiatives. Over the next 12 months, 66% say they plan to increase their level of investment in these projects. More leaders (30%) say they plan to increase their investment significantly, compared to 21% of followers and 17% of laggards. Businesses are also planning to digitise more documents and workflows in the future. Overall, 83% of respondents agree that their organisation plans to digitise more documents and workflows in the future. Leaders report the greatest intent to increase digitisation (87%), compared to followers (84%) and laggards (77%).

As organisations look to the future and embark on new employee experience priorities, continue digitisation efforts and tackle automation and advanced digital document workflows, they should keep several considerations in mind.

Involve employees from the start. When organisations are digitising and automating new workflows, they should work with frontline workers to understand their best practices and consider how automation could or could not improve them, Jezior says. 'You want to make sure you are improving on real challenges they have today. By solving those real challenges,

Evaluating Workflow Digitisation Progress

Digitisation can be as simple as taking paper forms, such as a job application and digitising them so they can be completed and assessed online or as complex as automating entire workflows, such as a customer support ticketing system. Such a system identifies the issue, prioritises it, routes it to an agent and ultimately updates the ticket status.

Most organisations are making progress in their digitisation journey. The survey finds that the majority (54%) say their organisation uses consistent forms and documents across a variety of channels (i.e. email, social media and apps) and uses some automated digital workflows. Thirty percent say their organisation uses some simple digital versions of paper-based documents and workflows, while 5% say their organisation primarily uses manual and/or paper-based documents and workflows. However, just 11% say their organisation uses personalised form and document experiences across channels and uses artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities to further automate repetitive or administrative tasks.

Though organisations are at different points in their digitisation journey, nearly three-quarters (72%) acknowledge that digitising workflows is very important to their organisation, with another 22% saying digitisation is somewhat important to their organisation.

'Leading organisations understand the value and necessity of digitising workflows – it is how business is being conducted today,' Jezior says. 'Paper forms just are not realistic, safe or secure. But it is also about improving that employee experience by eliminating those tedious processes and giving employees the tools they need to do their job better.'

Organisations are using a variety of tools to digitise workflows, most notably electronic signature solutions (70%) and document management systems (69%). They are also using customer relationship management tools (60%), workflow automation tools (56%) and enterprise resource planning tools (52%). Leaders stand out in document workflow automation (77%), compared to followers (68%) and laggards (46%).

you are enhancing the employee experience, which translates directly to the customer,' she says. 'As those employees are less burdened, they are better able to service the customer and the customer has a better experience overall.'

Start small. Jezior advises organisations to start small when tackling workflow digitisation or workflow automation projects. 'Look for the low-value-add, manual processes to digitise and automate first in order to improve that employee experience,' she says. Next, focus on intake processes, like customer onboarding. 'The intake processes usually have a lot of rich data up front in the development life cycle that trickles downstream. That has tremendous value in regard to better interpretation and better understanding of the context of why versus what is happening.' Hinchcliffe agrees. 'Don't go in trying to change the world,' he says, adding, 'Push through one new area at a time.'

Consider democratising data. Organisations embarking on workflow digitisation and automation can benefit in a number of ways from democratising data, says Shane Greenstein, professor of business administration in the technology, operations and management unit at Harvard Business School. Not only does broader employee access to data enable better data-driven decision making and continuous process improvement, democratising data also helps improve the customer experience. 'Companies should think about what operations you put behind democratising data if you are going to make that data available across your organisations,' he says. 'That can be difficult for organisations to think about in practice because it is not something firms have really had to think about before.'

The quality of your data should not be an afterthought, either, Mishra warns. 'Think about your processes and data together and make sure data gets as much attention as the process automation,' he says. 'If you do it right and structure it right, you create more flexibility in your system and you create a better solution.'

Invest in smarter workflows. Once organisations have a handle on digitisation, they typically consider whether they want to focus on making their workflows smarter or whether they want to focus more on automation, Van Mieghem says. He advises that companies focus first on making their workflows smarter. 'You don't want to automate systems that are not smart, because you open yourself up to making bad decisions based on the data,' he says. 'Investing in being smarter involves priorities like utilising all that digital information to help with a whole set of business processes – for example, forecasting predictions. You have more data available so you can set up

systems that will give guidance and help the humans actually make better decisions.'

Don't chase shiny tech objects. Don't approach workflow digitisation from the perspective of features and functions, Mishra says. This mindset instantly affects their potential for success. 'Features and functions are the worst enemy of experiences,' he says. 'To be able to deliver workflow digitisation, companies need to shift from thinking about documents and processes to thinking about experiences. Design the employee's ideal experience by deciding what part of it requires a document management system, what requires integration of multiple technologies and portals and what requires automation of the workflow. Those who are doing it right are thinking about workflow digitisation from the end-to-end employee experience perspective.'

Conclusion

Cultivating a strong employee experience is critical for organisations today as they continue to battle economic headwinds, technological disruption, workplace culture challenges and rising competitive pressures. A strong employee experience – in which employees feel supported, satisfied and successful – directly impacts the experience that organisations deliver to the customer.

Key to delivering an improved employee experience – and thus an improved customer experience – are continued efforts to digitise documents and workflows. These efforts are improving efficiency, creating time savings, streamlining processes, improving collaboration and more – all of which have positive impacts on the employee experience while enabling employees to do better work for the customer. Similar benefits are seen with workflow automation and advanced digital document workflows, two areas that hold great promise for improving efficiency, reducing errors and further streamlining processes.

To achieve these benefits, however, organisations must beware certain challenges. These include user adoption shortcomings, change management challenges and technology implementation obstacles. Working collaboratively across the organisation, agreeing on clearly defined priorities and obtaining input from end users from the start can help organisations surpass these barriers.

'The employee experience is at the centre in all of this,' Jezior says. 'Happy employees do better work and provide customers with better experiences. It is the organisation's responsibility to enable them with the tools they need, improve the processes they have and ensure that, in the end, that superior experience is reflected in the customer.'

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 508 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in June 2023. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if they were familiar with their organisation's digital workflow maturity and the tools and processes used to digitise workflows.

Size of Organisation

38%
10,000 or more employees

34%
1,000-9,999 employees

12%
500-999 employees

16%
100-499 employees

Seniority

29%
Executive management/
board members

35%
Senior management

22%
Middle management

14%
Other grades

Industry Sectors

17%
Technology

11%
Financial services

10%
Manufacturing

9%
Education

8%
Healthcare

All other sectors
less than 8% each.

Job Functions

11%
Operations/
product management

9%
General management

9%
HR/training

8%
IT

8%
Finance/risk

8%
Sales/business development

All other functions
less than 8% each.

Regions

43%
North America

22%
Europe

18%
Asia Pacific

10%
Middle East/Africa

6%
Latin America

Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



Harvard Business Review

ANALYTIC SERVICES

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