OMDIA

In partnership with

CompuCom®

Supporting employees in adapting to the new normal

Contents

APRIL 2021

Summary

Catalyst

This whitepaper, developed in partnership with CompuCom, analyzes North American businesses' response to the pandemic and how employee workstyles have subsequently been impacted. The research addresses the importance of businesses reprioritizing their digital technology investments to support a more distributed workforce and employee requests for more workstyle flexibility in the workplace.

Omdia View

2020 presented businesses across the world with a complex set of difficult challenges, with one of the most significant being the need to support and secure a highly distributed workforce at great scale and speed. In addition, employee requests for more flexible work arrangements (FWA) required businesses to consider not only new security and management solutions, but also how work practices needed to change to keep employees engaged and informed as well as help them manage their work-life balance to deliver improved customer outcomes. It was not only the locations people are working from that were subject to disruption, but the very nature of work also changed.

CompuCom commissioned Omdia to conduct a North American survey targeting organizations across multiple verticals to gather their insights on the challenges and disruptions they experienced during the pandemic and how these impacted their forward looking digital transformation priorities and plans. Among those surveyed were CIOs, CFOs, CTOs, CMOs, CHROs, IT Directors, and IT Operations Managers. All respondents were responsible in some way for their businesses' digital workplace strategic decisions.

Key Messages

- ► **The speed and scale of the transition to remote work was unprecedented**
  Remote work increased exponentially, with some companies experiencing a sevenfold increase over pre-pandemic rates of flexible working

- ► **A more distributed workforce is not a short-term trend**
  Businesses' familiarity with the benefits of remote work increase their willingness to support Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)

- ► **FWA requires more than just technology considerations**
  Businesses must consider people, processes, and technology to securely manage and enable a more distributed workforce

- ► **Businesses will need to overcome different challenges in realizing long-term value**
  Ensuring people could collaborate, improving employee well-being, and keeping workplace environments secure were all aspects business leaders found the most challenging in the rapid shift to remote work

- ► **Considering how employee support practices may need to change is vital**
  Whether in-office or remote, improving employee support with self-service and automation were identified as areas of great potential

- ► **Businesses need help in understanding employee productivity**
  Businesses need new and more accurate ways of understanding and measuring employee productivity and experience

- ► **Businesses need support from partners that understand and support their specific needs**
  Managed Services and technology providers with solutions tailored to specific industry needs were viewed as extremely important

The pandemic brought about long-term changes in the way employees work

Businesses attach greater priority to enabling and securing flexible work arrangements over the long term

As has been well documented, rates of remote work dramatically increased across all industries during the pandemic. In the education sector, for example, only 14% of employees worked remotely pre-pandemic, compared to 71% during the crisis.

Figure 1: Remote work prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Education sector

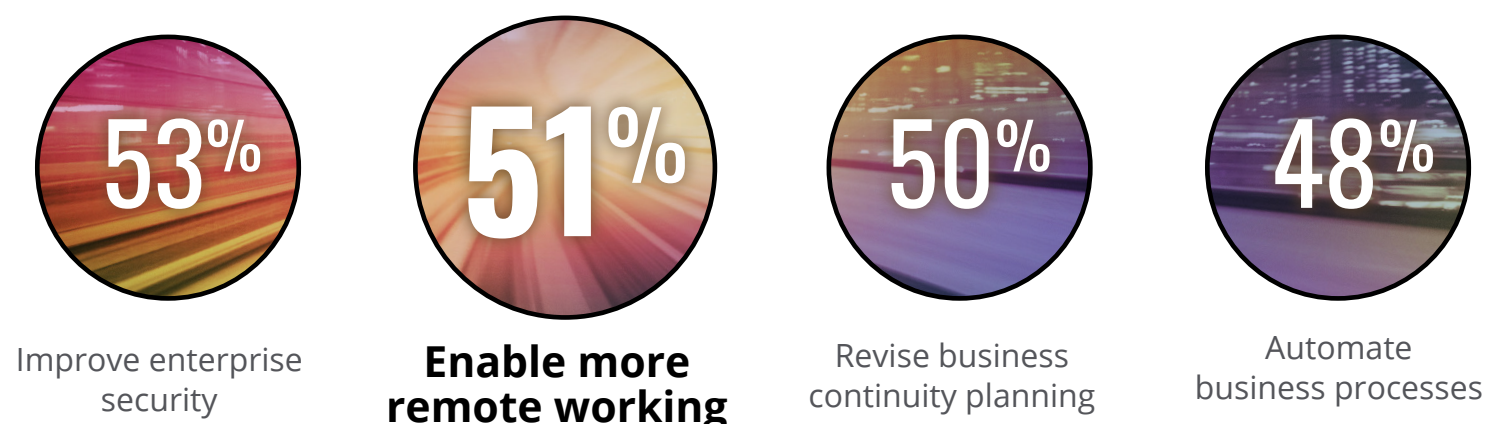**14%** Prior to COVID-19 pandemic

71% During COVID-19 pandemic
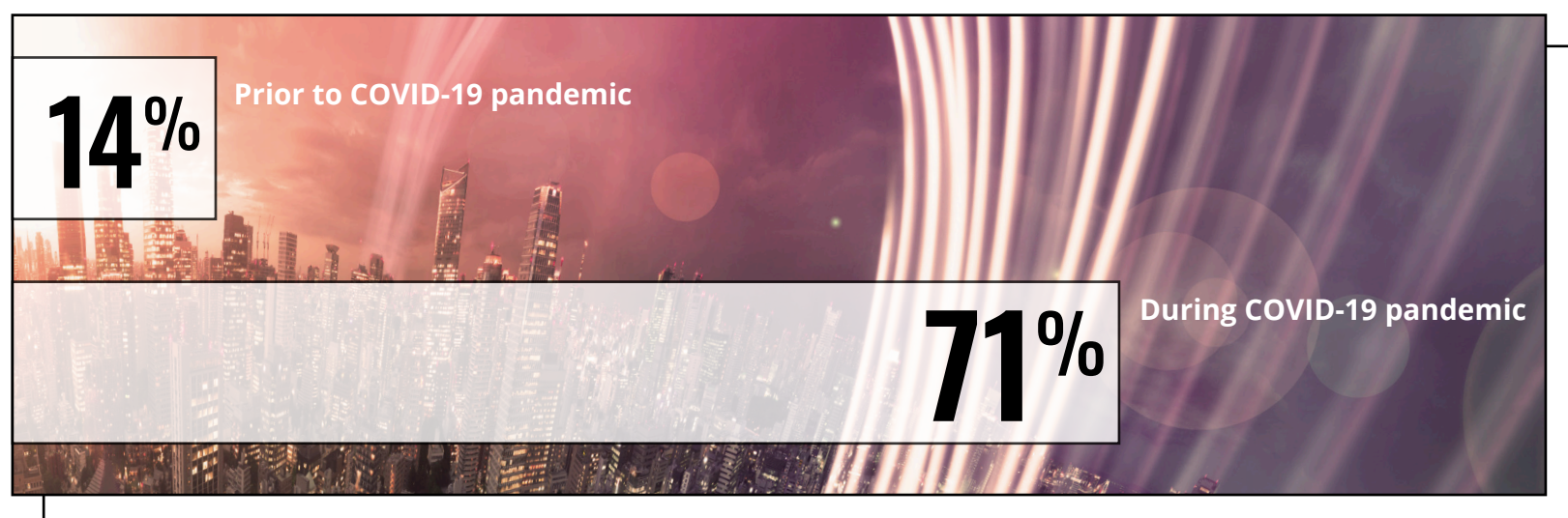
Source: Omdia

It's important that businesses do not adopt a short-term view and strategy when it comes to the Future of Work, as our research shows that the shift to FWA is set to stay over the long-term. As the data in figure 2 shows, 51% of businesses view the enablement of a distributed workforce as being a priority in their overall digital workplace strategy over the next 12-24 months, second only to improving cybersecurity.

Figure 2: Remote work enablement and security improvements are key digital workplace priorities

How will COVID-19 change your organization's digital workplace priorities in the next 12 to 24 months?

Showing top 4 responses identified as the highest priority

53% Improve enterprise security

51% **Enable more remote working**

50% Revise business continuity planning

48% Automate business processes

Source: Omdia

Only 1 in 5 businesses were fully prepared to support a distributed workforce

Businesses must ensure enabling flexible work arrangements (FWA) is not only viewed as a digital transformation objective, but also as an important business continuity consideration. Prior to the pandemic, only 16% of North American organizations considered remote work as part of their business continuity planning (BCP).

Figure 3: **Remote work not considered part of business continuity planning**

How prepared was your organization to support and manage employees working remotely during COVID-19?

36%
We had business continuity plans in place and were moderately prepared to support and manage employees working remotely
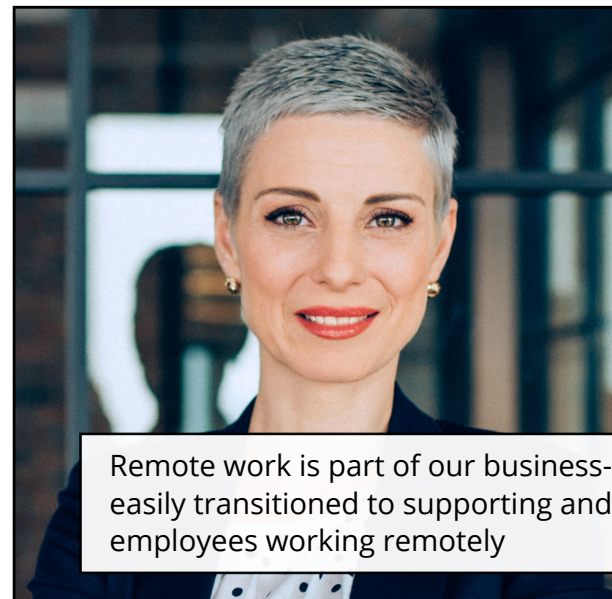
26%
We had business continuity plans in place, but were only adequately prepared to support and manage employees working remotely

12%
We did not have business continuity plans in place and were unprepared to support and manage employees working remotely

16%
Remote work is part of our business-model, so we easily transitioned to supporting and managing employees working remotely
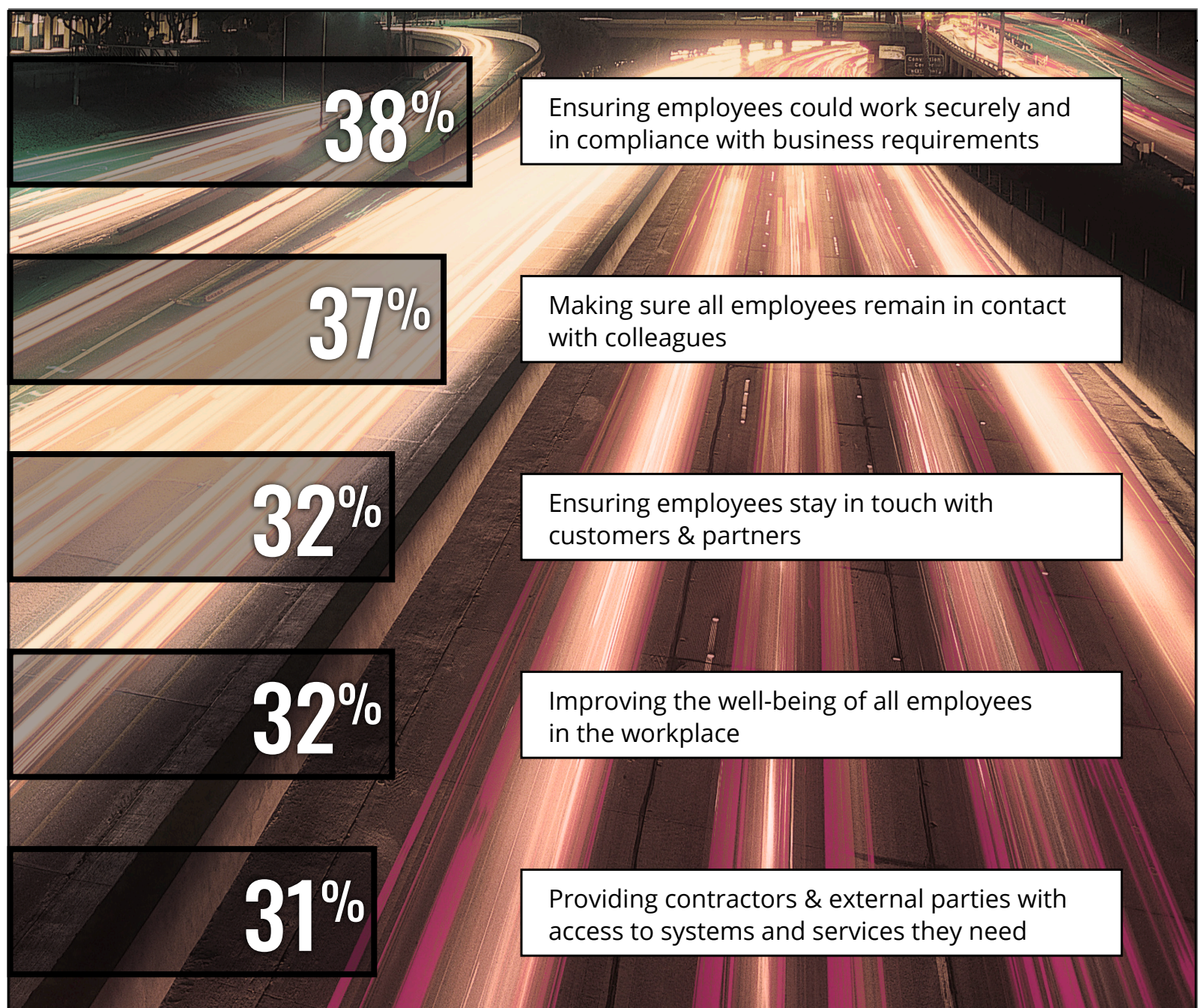
Source: Omdia

For the 16% reporting remote work as part of their business model, the rapid transition to remote work was seamless. However, half of the businesses surveyed were unprepared to facilitate increased levels of remote work for employees, even when they had a business continuity plan in place. BCP and Disaster Recovery (DR) are often terms that are used interchangeably and, although the plans for both are often created by many of the same personnel, it is important that businesses remember they are not the same. BCP is more aligned to help in the restoration of business operations and processes during a crisis, whereas DR tends to focus on restoring interrupted and degraded services and infrastructure following a disaster. The pandemic introduced the need to also consider future physical workplace ergonomics and design, as the office's importance as a central location for collaboration will not completely go away.

Security, employee well-being and support are the most challenging aspects of remote work

Some business leaders found one of the most challenging aspects of managing a highly distributed workforce was ensuring employees could work securely and in compliance with regulatory and business requirements (38%). In addition, continuing cross-team collaboration was rated by 37% of respondents as a major issue of concern.

Figure 4: The most challenging aspects of a distributed workforce

What were the more challenging aspects for your company in terms of remote/home working?

38% — Ensuring employees could work securely and in compliance with business requirements

37% — Making sure all employees remain in contact with colleagues

32% — Ensuring employees stay in touch with customers & partners

32% — Improving the well-being of all employees in the workplace

31% — Providing contractors & external parties with access to systems and services they need

Source: Omdia

It will be these areas that businesses will be looking to develop and improve upon going forward as more employees work in more mobile and remote environments in the long term. Additionally, businesses also identified ensuring employees can stay in touch with customers and partners (32%) as well as optimizing employee well-being at work (32%) as being notable challenges. This highlights the importance for all business leaders to remember that successfully delivering and supporting remote work is not only about the technology—more people-centric factors must also be considered.

Successful digital initiatives are reliant on new operating models and business values as well as new technologies

FWA requires businesses consider people, processes, and technology

Delivering successful digital transformation requires businesses not only adopt new technologies and services, but also new operating models that support change efforts that will lead to desired outcomes. Understanding employee constraints and challenges related to work and restructuring business operational structures are examples of areas that must be considered in addition to new technologies. In evolving operational models in support of digital transformation efforts, it is the breaking down of command and control silos to improve employee experiences (34%), and the use of data driven insights to deliver measurable business outcomes (30%) that businesses view as being the most important values.

Figure 5: Business values that help deliver successful digital transformation

Rank these values in order of importance to your digital transformation journey after the COVID-19 pandemic:

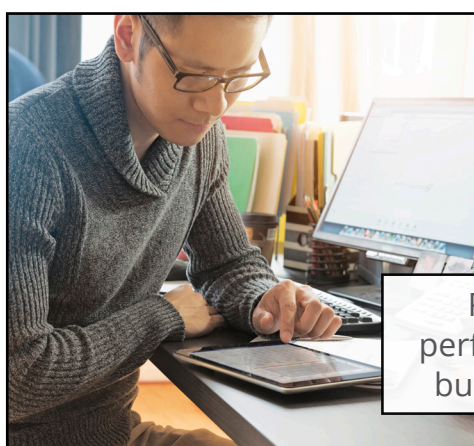Values identified as being 'most important' by respondents
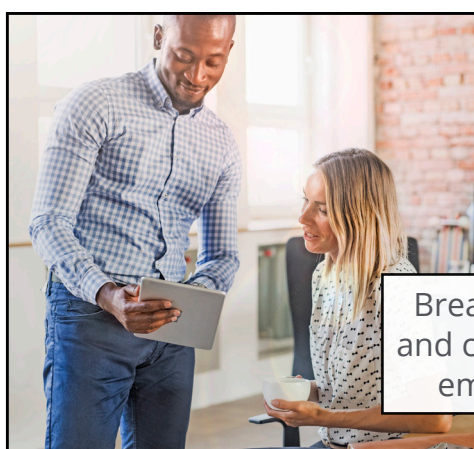
34% Breaking down command and control silos to improve employee experiences

30% Using data driven insights to deliver measurable business outcomes

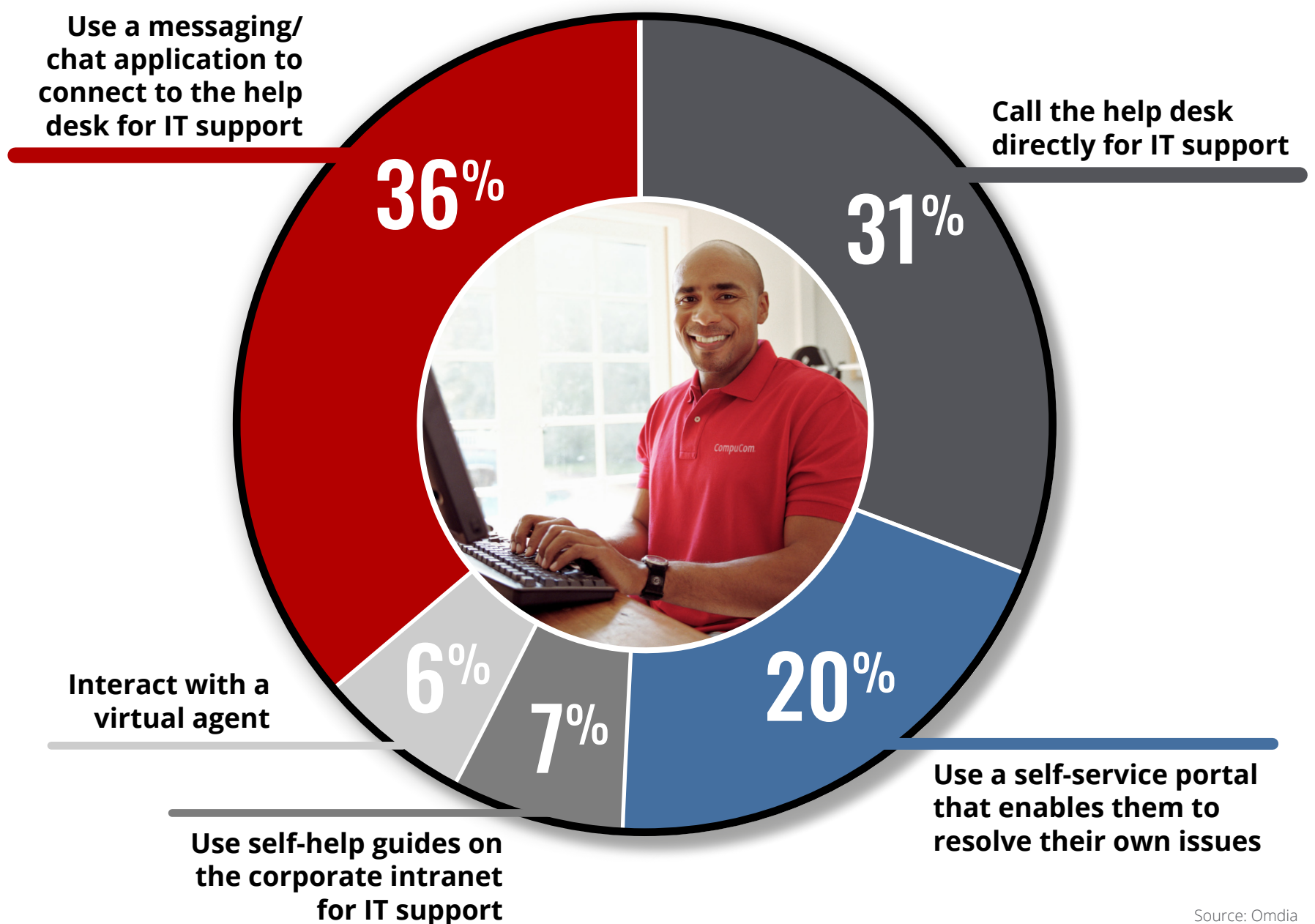**22**% Prizing speed over perfection to exploit new business opportunities

14% Using employee journey mapping to identify systemic barriers to productivity

Source: Omdia

New ways of working require proactive and automated support approaches

As greater numbers of employees work in a more fluid fashion, both returning to physical workplaces as well as continuing to work remotely, the ways in which they are supported must also change. Supporting employees in new ways and improving the processes that guide how people are supported is vital to ensuring the success of future in-office or long-term remote work scenarios. The primary methods by which users are currently supported by IT is quite traditional through messaging and chat applications, and by calling the help desk directly.

Figure 6: **How IT currently supports employees**

Which is the primary method by which your users are commonly supported by IT and the help desk?

Use a messaging/ chat application to connect to the help desk for IT support

36%

Call the help desk directly for IT support

31%

Interact with a virtual agent

6%

7%

20%

Use self-help guides on the corporate intranet for IT support

Use a self-service portal that enables them to resolve their own issues

Source: Omdia

As people work in a more mobile fashion, support approaches must evolve in becoming more intuitive and proactive. Self-service support capabilities and virtual agents will be important, not only in reducing the workload of IT teams, but in also improving employee experiences. As the data in figure 6 shows, these more advanced support capabilities have yet to see mass adoption as a primary method of support, which means there is a strong opportunity for businesses to deliver improvements in this area.

Interest in new workplace technologies driven by a desire to improve employee productivity and enterprise security

When planning investment around new workplace technologies, there is no single dominant business driver influencing decisions. Businesses identify a variety of different objectives as being of high importance, including improving customer experiences (26%), improving security, employee productivity, and reducing business costs (all 24%).

Figure 7: The business priorities influencing investments in new workplace technologies

Source: Omdia

26%
Improving customer experiences

24%
Improving security of business data and information

24%
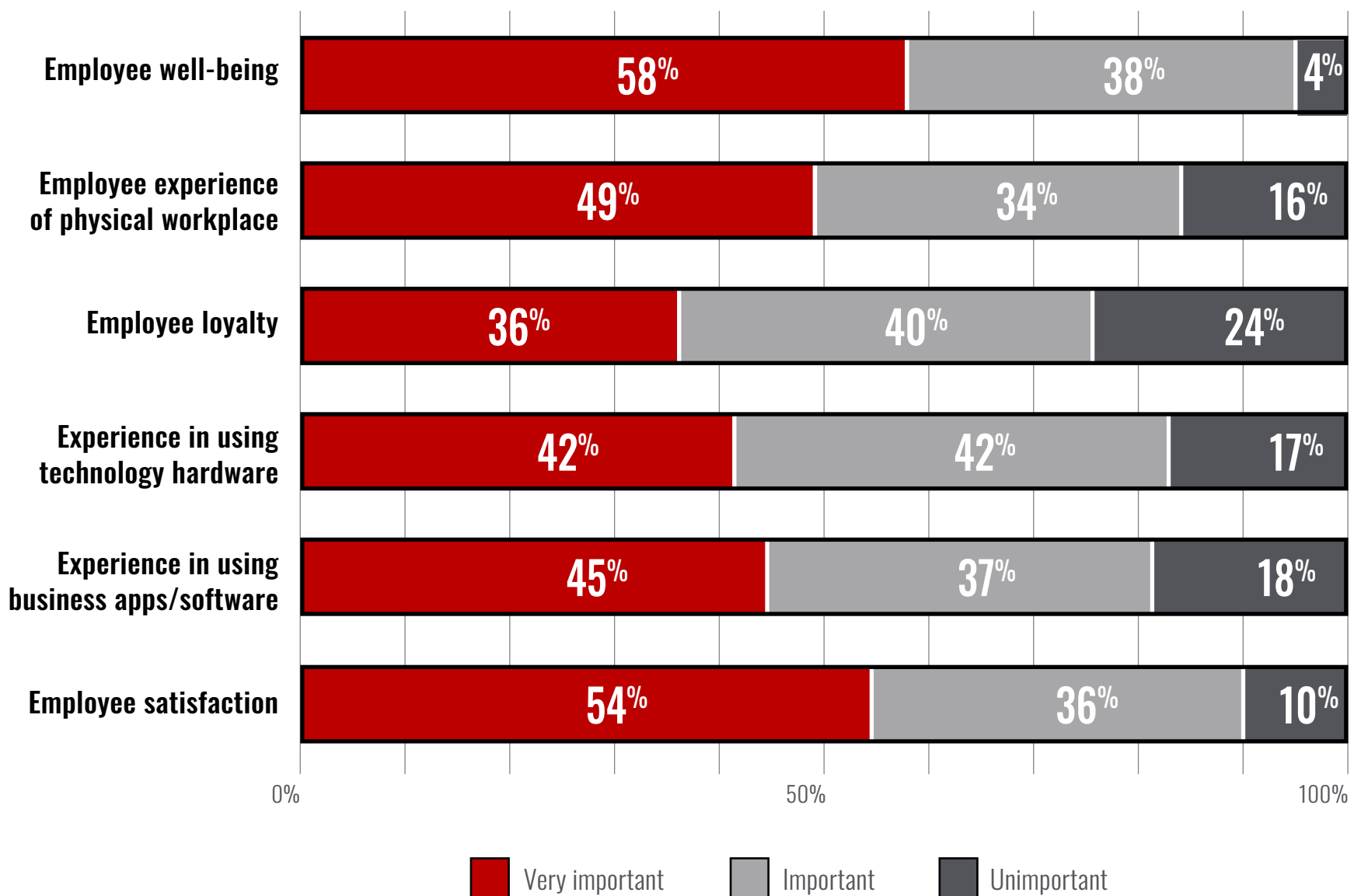Reducing overall business costs

24%
Improving employee productivity

The priority attached to these business drivers highlights the importance of ensuring that any investment in new workplace capabilities is done so with a view to delivering against multiple business objectives or needs. Understanding that technologies that deliver against more people-focused needs will be vital to maximizing technology investment value for businesses going forward.

Businesses need new ways of measuring and understanding employee productivity

Organizations are currently reliant on traditional and somewhat dated methods of measuring employee productivity that will not provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of remote worker efficiency or experience going forward. For example, 80% of respondents identified PC-based time tracking applications as being the primary means by which they currently measure employee productivity. Considering the long-term plans many businesses have around remote work, it is important that new management practices and more modern ways of understanding and measuring worker productivity are embraced. New methods focused on outputs and outcomes are needed in drawing a more accurate picture of employee productivity, but also on factors including employee experience and well-being. Encouragingly, employee well-being is being recognized by organizations as an important consideration going forward.

Figure 8: **The factors businesses view as being important in understanding employee experiences**

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant
Employee well-being	58%	38%	4%
Employee experience of physical workplace	49%	34%	16%
Employee loyalty	36%	40%	24%
Experience in using technology hardware	42%	42%	17%
Experience in using business apps/software	45%	37%	18%
Employee satisfaction	54%	36%	10%

Source: Omdia

As figure 8 shows, businesses also view employee satisfaction as being an important element in improving overall employee experiences. Concerningly, however, employee loyalty is not considered as important as other elements when it comes to understanding employee experiences. Encouraging employee loyalty should absolutely be an objective for organizations.

Businesses will need strategic help from partners in navigating the new normal

Digital workplace investments are being directed towards capabilities that help improve employee support

In supporting distributed workforce experiences, businesses are currently focused predominantly on ensuring IT infrastructure is remote-employee ready. Businesses are placing increased importance on providing proactive IT support to create more efficiency and to better serve the support needs of their remote employees. Improving the way that employees are supported is also an important objective driving businesses' investment in new digital capabilities. Over the next two years, businesses are planning to invest significantly in centralized and automated employee self-service and support solutions and automated IT operations capabilities, as shown in figure 10.

Figure 10: **The top 5 digital capabilities businesses identify as important going forward**

Which types of digital capabilities do you see as being most important to your business in the future?

Showing top five responses based on investment plans over the next 24 months. The top two responses have a >1% difference

1 Centralized and automated employee self-service and support solution

2 IT Operations Automation (Remote diagnostics and AI-powered IT self-healing capabilities)

3 Device as a Service (Predictable IT spending with flexible payments)

4 IT Asset Disposition (serialized and non-serialized asset tracking, recycling and disposal)

5 Process and workflow automation platforms

Source: Omdia

Organizations value partners that offer capable technologies and understand industry challenges

In realizing the opportunities and overcoming the challenges associated with digital transformation, organizations will value partners that not only offer capable technologies that can be deployed quickly, but also those that understand the specific industry challenges they face.

Figure 11: **The partner attributes businesses value most**

In better supporting your businesses digital transformation objectives, what are the top three attributes you value the most from your current IT partners?

Showing top four responses ranked as 1st and 2nd priority combined

34%
Offers services/solutions that are specific to our industry
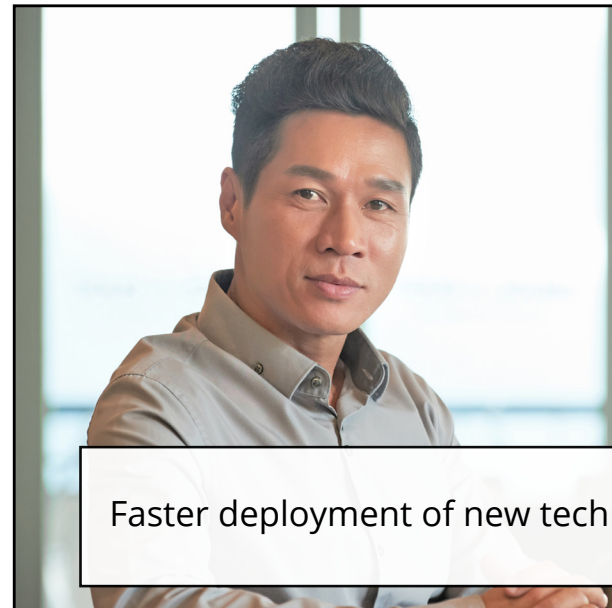
30%
Faster deployment of new technologies

29%
Access to a dedicated service manager that understands our business needs and goals

28%
Availability of financing (invoice credit, device financing, a technology fund, etc.)

Source: Omdia

Partnerships based on strategic outcomes will be of increased importance to businesses going forward, especially as they look to get more value from investments in technologies and services that help secure and manage remote workforces. The high priority attached to industry specific solutions and access to a dedicated service manager is evidence of the need businesses have for more tailored support from partners.

Appendix

Author

Adam Holtby

Principal Analyst, Workspace Services

Adam.holtby@omdia.com

Get in touch

www.omdia.com

askananalyst@omdia.com

Omdia consulting

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We create business advantage for our customers by providing actionable insight to support business planning, product development, and go-to-market initiatives.

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We hope that this analysis will help you make informed and imaginative business decisions. If you have further requirements, Omdia's consulting team may be able to help your company identify future trends and opportunities.

CompuCom

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