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Elevating Hybrid Work Success with Improved Visibility

Third-party performance management tools provide a critical view of what's happening across the workplace collaboration ecosystem

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Third-party performance management tools provide a critical view of what's happening across the workplace collaboration ecosystem

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

For most companies today, hybrid work has become the modus operandi. On any given day, some employees will be working from home, and others from the office—and no matter where they are, they need to be able to communicate and collaborate with ease. Theoretically, a flexible hybrid work model helps generate a positive employee experience. However, challenges persist around issues such as application performance, bandwidth constraints, voice and video quality, and technology inequity between in-office and remote workers.

To support the modern, hybrid workplace, IT leaders must:

- Provide correlation between hybrid work policies and technologies with key performance indicators such as employee satisfaction and turnover
- Invest in tools that provide real-time and predictive visibility into communications and collaboration application performance, across all deployed apps
- Address Wi-Fi, Internet, and VPN performance of work-from-home environments that hinders remote workers to communicate and collaborate effectively
- Likewise, adjust in-office Wi-Fi capacity, Internet bandwidth, and network architecture to support increasing real-time communications traffic
- Deploy personal devices such as webcams or all-in-one video meeting/whiteboarding desktops to improve the remote work experience
- Invest in new meeting room technology, such as one-touch-join and room-attendee framing, to remove friction in launching video meetings and to create equity between in-office and remote participants
- Include voice calling in hybrid work planning—an increase or decrease in calling may call for a revamp on architecture choices
- Gather insight into the user experience via tools for optimizing performance and management

Hybrid Work Evolving

The hybrid work model is becoming modus operandi for many companies as they craft go-forward workplace strategies that define policies about who works where and when. In its *Workplace Collaboration: 2023-24* research study conducted earlier this year, Metrigy found that 31.2% of the 440 participating companies already have hybrid work options available, while employees at 25.1% and 37.4% of companies, respectively, always work remotely or in the office (see Figure 1). The balance will shift going forward, with 52% of companies saying they'll ultimately support some type of hybrid work (see Figure 2). Of those, roughly 35% will allow employees the choice of whether they spend time working in a company office, and at what frequency, while 27% have determined that they want employees to work at least part time in the office. Beyond those, another quarter will require a full-time return to the office, while a smattering (7.3%) will continue going all-in on remote work.

Current Work Location (All Companies)					
	Full-time Remote	Full-time In-office	Hybrid	Field	Other
Small (<=250)	23.1%	42.1%	30.5%	19.3%	8.8%
Midsize (251-2,500)	23.6%	38.2%	33.1%	15.7%	10.3%
Large (>2,500)	28.5%	32.0%	30.2%	19.6%	7.0%
Mean (All Sizes)	25.1%	37.4%	31.2%	18.2%	8.7%

Figure 1: Current Work Location (All Companies)

Workplace experts often tout factors such as work-life balance and the flexibility that comes with hybrid work for positively influencing employee experience. But companies are wise to take measure themselves and use their findings to adjust workplace strategies as needed. Fortunately, most companies are looking to correlate hybrid work with factors such as employee satisfaction and turnover. In Metrigy's workplace collaboration study, 62% of all companies said they're using employee satisfaction as a key
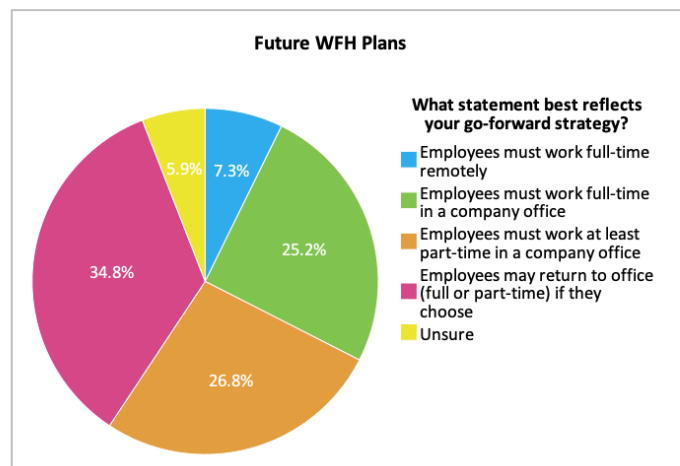

Figure 2: Future WFH Plans

performance indicator (KPI) for hybrid work success. Many also consider employee turnover as a key hybrid work KPI to track, and doing so highly correlates to success: 62.2% of the most successful companies in this study identified turnover as their most-used KPI, compared to only 41% of the non-success group. With these and other KPIs in hand, what some companies may discover is that their hybrid model works better on paper then in practice, for myriad reasons.

Hybrid Work Challenges

A critical premise of hybrid work is that employees are able to communicate and collaborate easily regardless of where they happen to be situated on any given day. Hybrid work requires seamless interconnections from home-to-home, home-to-office, office-to-office, and any combination of the three, one-to-one or multipoint. Unfortunately, challenges continue to plague hybrid work for many on both ends of a hybrid workplace, and companies should recognize the need to adjust strategies as they seek resolutions. Challenges include the remote work environment, expectations around video meetings, and changing voice demands.

Remote Work Challenges

Metrigy's research shows home Wi-Fi performance is still problematic, a primary challenge associated with working from home for 38.9% of companies (see Figure 3). This concern is second only to a lost sense of community and culture, a primary WFH challenge for 40.6%. And, as shown below, Wi-Fi isn't the only snag affecting communications and collaboration among disparately located colleagues. Home Internet and VPN performance, as well as video and voice quality, are primary challenges for between 17.2% and 33.7% of companies.
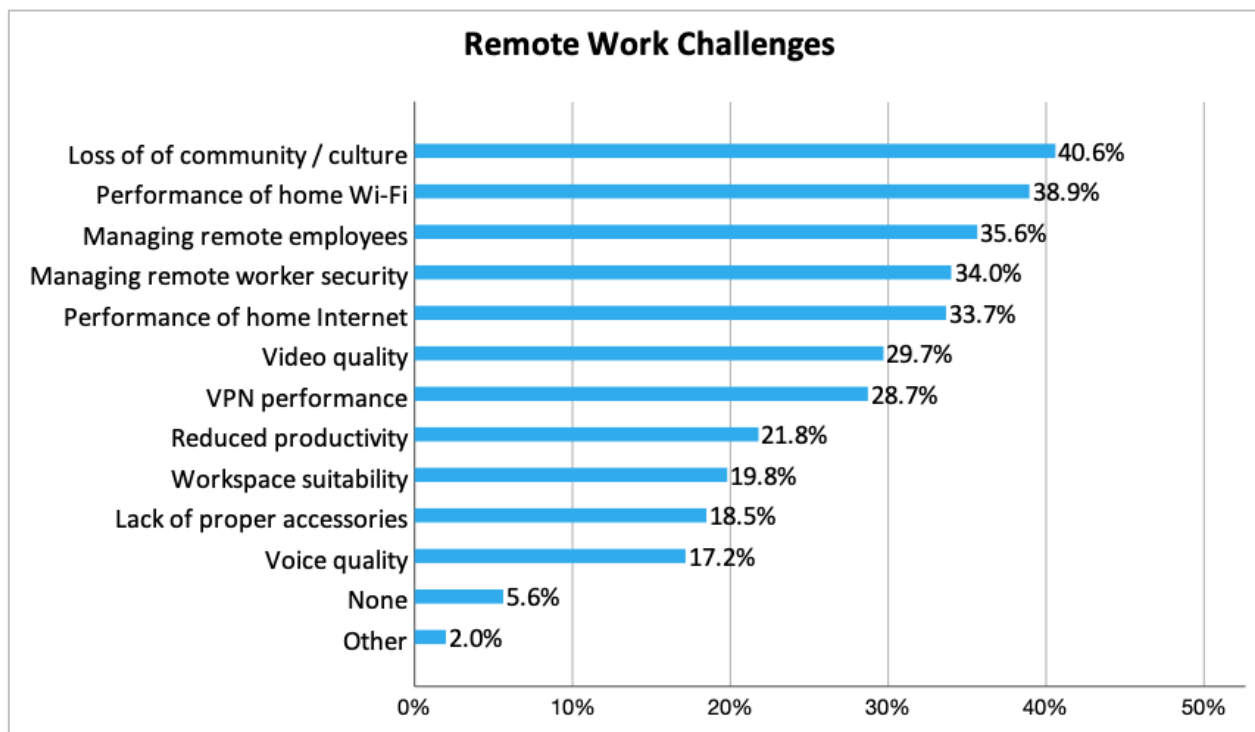

Figure 3: Remote Work Challenges

Video Expectations

In support of their hybrid work models, many companies today might say they live and die based on their video meeting services and technology. In fact, 37.6% of all companies and 47.6% of the most successful companies, as determined by cost savings, revenue growth, and improved

productivity, in Metrigy's workplace collaboration study say they can't tolerate any downtime—video conferencing is that critical of a technology for their businesses. An additional 45.2% say video is important, although not critically so. To help optimize video performance, reliability, and availability, 40% of companies in Metrigy's workplace collaboration study have expanded Wi-Fi capacity in offices, while around 30% each have increased bandwidth and added Internet bandwidth, and about half have implemented a software-defined WAN, or SD-WAN, architecture.

Metrigy's research also shows that, culturally, video-first is a reality for nearly 20% of all companies and an even higher percentage, 25.4%, of the most successful companies. At video-first companies, all group meetings and one-to-one conversations take place via video. While all-video all-the-time is an extreme, using videos for *most* meetings is commonplace, with this best reflecting the video posture of 61.4% of companies. Rare is the company that seldom uses video or, even more so, that has video enabled but doesn't see employees making use of their cameras. Unusual, too, is the company that hasn't seen video use increase. Nearly 64% of all companies and more than 68% of the most successful companies report video utilization increasing in the last year, for example.

In supporting a video-first or video-mostly strategy, about half of companies have standardized on a single meeting provider (see Figure 4). Of those, however, 21.2% plan on adding in more options. Meantime, more than half of the 37.9% of companies supporting multiple meeting providers plan to keep on doing so rather than consolidating down to one. Note that these figures relate to only corporate-purchased meeting services. Companies may allow the use of other meeting apps, but neither pay for nor support them.
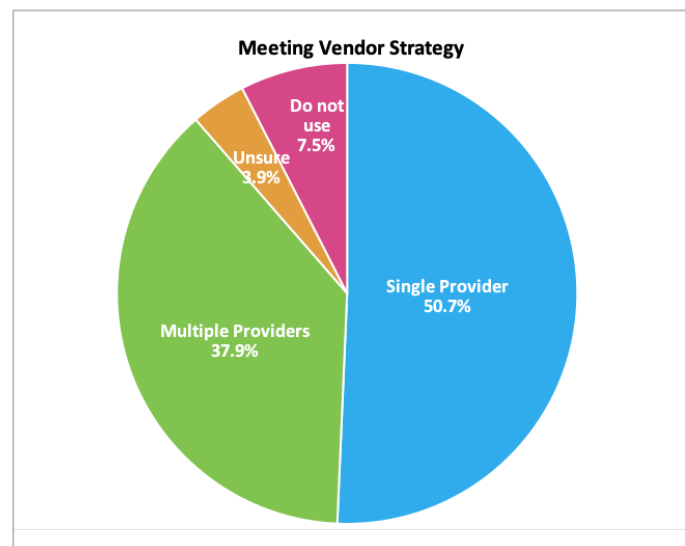

Figure 4: Meeting Vendor Strategy

Whether video is critical or just important, in use all or most of the time, or provided by a single or multiple providers, the prevalence of video meetings among a hybrid workforce is necessitating a rethink for many companies around personal devices and in-room systems.

Personal Video Devices

Companies realizing the greatest level of success around hybrid work outfit employees working from home with more devices than companies that aren't as successful with their hybrid strategies. Specific to video, laptops with webcams are standard gear at this juncture, provisioned by 80% of the success group. Standalone webcams aren't as widely deployed, but

still correlate with success: 37.8% of the success group provision these devices vs. 33.7% of the non-success group. More significant is the use of all-in-one personal desktop meeting/whiteboard displays for WFH, with 86.2% higher adoption in the success group compared to the non-success group.

In-room Systems and Devices

Many companies, including the most successful ones, are increasing room system deployments and adopting additional technologies to improve the meeting experience for in-person and remote attendees. Some of these technologies, such as room systems that offer one-touch-join to a primary meeting app, aim to reduce the friction often associated with joining a meeting. Among Metrigy's study group, 58.8% already have outfitted rooms with one-touch-join, while 35.1% are either planning to deploy as early as this year or are evaluating the technology. Other technologies, such as room-attendee framing, center table camera systems, and multiple cameras in rooms, help create meeting equity by improving visibility of in-room meeting participants for remote attendees. Of these latter technologies, room-attendee framing is most in use or planned for use, by nearly 46% of companies.

Voice Demands

Voice calling tends not to get as much attention as video when strategizing on hybrid work, but for some companies it is no less as important a means of communication. In fact, Metrigy's research shows a greater percentage of companies (36.5%) charting increasing call volumes using internal phone systems than decreasing call volumes (21.7%). User preference for voice over video is one key driver for the bump in calls, cited by 57.3% of companies. On the flip side, chat and meeting apps have become voice replacements for approximately 77% and 62%, respectively. Additionally, nearly 44% report calls shifting from company phone systems to personal mobile devices.

While the use of multiple calling providers is not as prevalent as it is for video meetings, this is an operational model for about 18% of companies. Most of these companies do not plan on consolidating to a single provider.

Understanding changing calling demands is critical for companies planning their go-forward strategies for voice support, and questions abound. These include:
- Is the enterprise phone system on premises, hosted, or provided via a cloud service—and is the current model the best for hybrid work?
- If moving to the cloud or staying on prem are on the table, what are the key drivers? Cost savings is the top driver among Metrigy's study group, with better WFH support a close follower: 40.3% and 39.5%, respectively. The ability to offload management is desirable for 19.4%. Conversely, those staying on prem also are driven primarily by cost savings (59%), with reliability (36.1%) and security (21.3%) rounding out the top three.

- Would it make sense for your company to deploy a mobile app as the primary calling platform? Nearly 21% have already made this move, while 52% are either in planning or evaluation stages.
- If you're using Microsoft for meetings and/or messaging, should you use the application for calling, too? And, if so, will you use a Microsoft calling plan or bring your own carrier? Of those companies that currently have Microsoft 365 licenses but don't use Teams calling, only 21.7% say they have no plans to adopt Teams Phone System. The remainder either have adoption plans in place for as early as this year, next year, or beyond (36.9%) or, to a slightly higher degree at 39.1%, are evaluating the option. The top driver for a move to Teams Phone System is delivery of an integrated user experience, for 64.7%. Here, too, simplified UC management surfaces as a top driver, for 35.3%.
- Do you need to rethink how you deploy session border controllers (SBCs), which are such critical control and security components of a voice architecture? While 40.7% are running their SBCs as virtual software in their data centers, offloading responsibility by obtaining SBC as a cloud-based service from a SIP trunking provider is an increasingly popular option. Today, 44.4% of all companies and 75% of the most successful companies have deployed SBC as a service (SBCaaS), and 72.7% of those companies that own their own SBCs today plan to make a change to this model as a 2023 roadmap plan.

Placing a Premium on Performance and Management

To support the modern, hybrid workplace, IT and business leaders must have insight into the user experience and have tools in place for optimizing performance and management through the workplace collaboration (WC) ecosystem. This includes consideration of:

- Endpoints – Management of headsets, handsets, video endpoints, etc., to include inventory, provisioning, security, and performance
- Security – Enterprise-wide provisioning of security and compliance controls based on policy, as well as use of third-party tools supporting multi-platform environments
- Administration – Configuration, event, and address management, among other things, plus self-service capabilities to enable feature management, password reset, etc.
- Performance – Monitor app uptime, network, problem/resolution, root-cause analysis, and ongoing performance of WC apps

Only once tools are in place for optimizing performance and management will companies be able to ensure their hybrid work strategies can deliver desired business outcomes such as cost savings, revenue increase, and improved productivity. Indeed, as Metrigy has found in its workplace collaboration research, success correlates with the use of device, video, and voice performance management. Specifically, as shown in Figure 5 on the next page, use of device, video, and voice performance insights among the success group exceeds the use among those companies that aren't successful today with their workplace collaboration strategies: 65.6% vs 49.9% in the case of device performance, 59.4% vs 49.9% for video performance, and 51.6% vs 42.1% for voice performance.

Likewise, success correlates to the use of communications and collaboration management tools, whether from the app or service provider itself, a network management vendor, or a third-party performance management provider such as Virsae.

Companies must understand the differences:

Figure 5: What insights do you need to effectively manage WC?

- Vendor-provided tools – While these are available at no additional cost, they're limited in support to just the provider's WC application or service. As such, they often lack network insight.
- Network management tools – These typically provide insight into voice/video performance across the network, but lack end-to-end visibility as well as administration, security, and other additional management functions
- Third-party performance management tools – These tools are optimized for WC administration and/or management. They may interface with or include network management tools and, as an additional benefit, enable unified management of a multivendor environment. Among those companies using third-party tools, roughly one third report a reduction in mean time to repair (MTTR). On average, they've seen a 36-minute reduction in MTTR using a third-party tool.
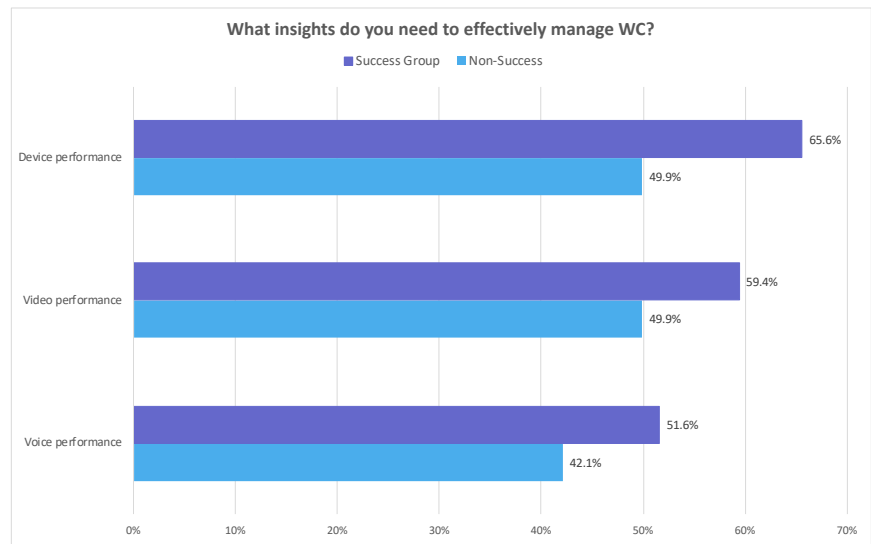
Interestingly, 20% of companies in Metrigy's study group are not using any performance and management tools. This is a mistake that should be rectified with careful evaluation of available options. Certainly, any company with a multivendor environment, whether they have other tools in place already, should consider adopting third-party performance management for the cross-ecosystem visibility and insights they provide. Questions to ask potential providers include:

1. What is your delivery model? Do you run in the cloud, on hosted or on-premises services, or either?
2. How does your tool work? What types of data do you collect, how are you analyzing it, and what insights do you surface?
3. What can I expect to have handled via automation vs. what I'll have to do manually when using the tool?
4. Can you deliver real-time performance data for my voice and video applications? How would I receive notice of incidents in real-time?
5. Which voice and video applications do you support?

6. What if I would also like to get performance management details on my contact center. Is that possible with your tool?
7. How customizable will my performance management dashboard be?
8. How often can I expect tool upgrades?
9. What customer success metrics can you share with me?
10. What is your pricing model?

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hybrid work, foisted on many companies in recent years, is becoming more and more entrenched. With the proper policies and technologies in place, hybrid work can lead to benefits such as reduced costs, revenue increases, and productivity gains while also improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover. However, challenges persist, and IT must work to smooth them out.

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