

Expectation vs reality for knowledge workers

2024 Scalable Software Digital Employee Experience (DEX) Report

Scalable^{AI}





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Introduction: The working world in flux

Just a few years ago, most knowledge workers found themselves working from home almost overnight. That fully remote model then quickly became hybrid working, which was heralded far and wide as the “new norm”. Fast forward to today, and the debate over the future of work has come almost full circle as the Work from Home (WFH) vs Return to Office (RTO) battle heats up. As global firms like Amazon and Zoom mandate that employees RTO full-time, C-Suite concerns over productivity are transforming the working world once more.

Against this backdrop, IT decision makers are trying to keep up with the pace of change and meet the technology demands of the workforce wherever they are. And HR teams are charged with keeping staff engaged, productive and satisfied in an environment where they may rarely see employees in person. Increasingly, HR and IT teams experience crossover because so much of work is conducted via digital channels.

But where does this period of flux leave knowledge workers? What is the reality of the remote, hybrid and in-office working experience for today’s employees? And how can organizations know how productive and engaged employees are if they are unable to measure those experiences objectively and accurately?

To answer these questions, we asked 2,000 UK knowledge workers about their employee experiences today. Building on research first conducted in 2021, this 2024 report uncovers how digital employee experiences (DEX) are changing for remote, hybrid and in-office workers. It also explores the importance of visibility into the day-to-day digital reality of employees to enable organizations to optimize experiences for success.



DEX deep-dive shows experiences are getting worse

Knowledge workers rely on access to digital technology, applications and services to do their jobs, wherever they are working from. Our research finds that while most knowledge workers feel well-equipped to work from home, enterprises should be wary that 40% of respondents say that hybrid working makes their job more difficult. This finding was even higher in organizations with 1,001-1,500 employees (54%) and in those with 2,001-3,000 employees (55%).

Is it more difficult to do your job when working from home because you don't have access to all the technology you need, or you can't access certain applications or data?

Yes

40%

No

60%

But access to technology itself is only half the battle for companies in any model of working. A deep-dive into how technology performs day-to-day for all employees (remote, hybrid, in-office) shows that the digital employee experience (DEX) is getting worse. Almost a fifth (18%) of employees rated the DEX provided by their employer as poor, up from 15% in 2021.

How would you rate the digital experience your employer provides to you?



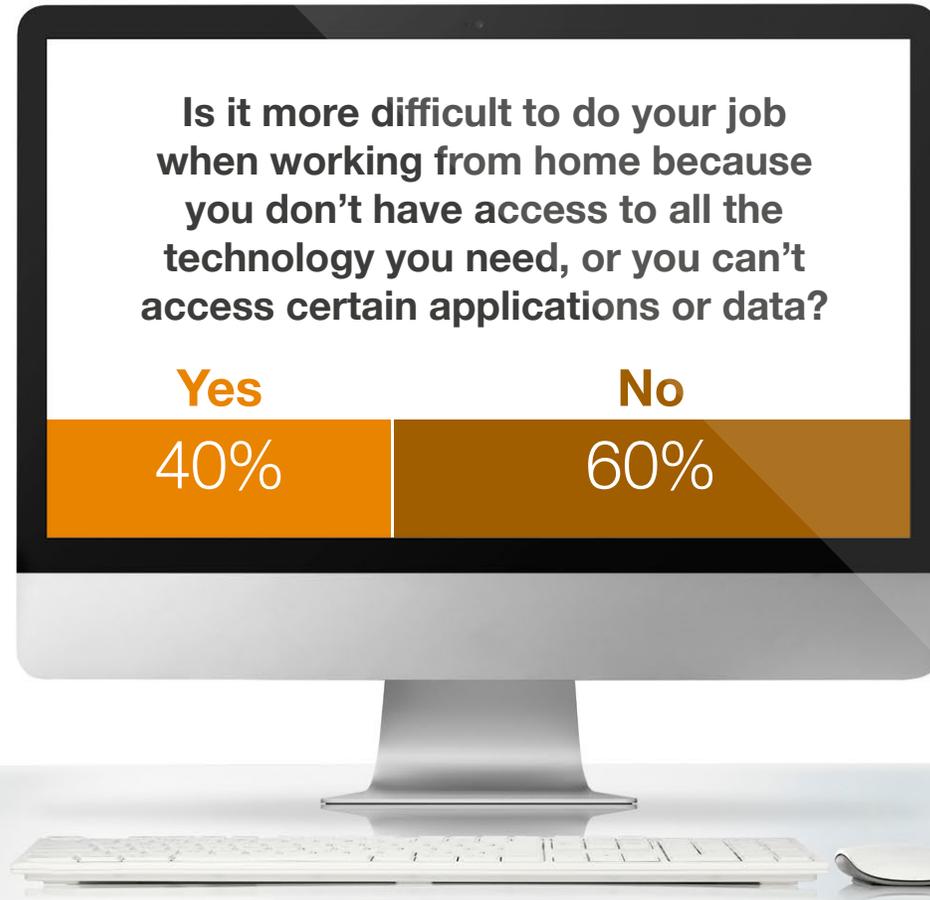
Poor
18%



Adequate
34%



Good
48%





One reason for poor DEX is the high incidence of digital friction. Our research finds that knowledge workers are experiencing multiple instances of digital friction across many areas, from “notification overload” (30%) to application switching (35%). Digital friction is a particular scourge that affects DEX and is a drain on productivity. One [study](#) of knowledge workers by Harvard Business Review revealed that excessive toggling between apps alone causes workers to spend four hours a week “reorienting” themselves between windows.

The range of different types of friction experienced underlines why today’s enterprises must achieve visibility into the real-life DEX of the workforce to identify and mitigate these roadblocks to effective work.

Digital friction is defined by [Gartner](#) as the “unnecessary effort extended by employees using technology for work”. It can come in the form of anything that is a roadblock to employees’ productivity. Digital friction is one of the biggest culprits for poor DEX. Gartner finds that [47% of technology users](#) experience high digital friction, and [34%](#) experience this friction several times a week.

Which of the following examples of digital friction have you experienced at work?



Applications that repeatedly freeze, crash or load slowly
47%



Lack of instructions/training on how to use an application or software
29%



Too many communication channels to manage resulting in “notification overload”
30%



Having to toggle between applications repeatedly to find information or complete a task
35%



User interfaces that are hard to navigate and are confusing
24%



Unable to find the right data/ records to complete a task
23%



Complicated workflows that require extra steps to complete, even for routine tasks
28%

The impact on the business and the bottom line

Badly executed digital experiences mired in friction add up to significant wasted time for businesses. The data show that knowledge workers waste an average of 2.72 hours a week because their employer hasn't provided them with the right technology. This finding was higher in organizations with 1,501-2,000 employees (3.77 hours) and in those with 2,001-3,000 employees (3.55 hours). Looking at individual sectors, knowledge workers in business services and telecoms report losing the most time, at 3.58 hours and 3.42 hours respectively.

An additional 2.83 hours a week on average is wasted because employees are struggling with technology that simply doesn't work, runs slowly, or because of poor design and inefficient workflow. Again, this statistic was higher in companies with 1,501-2,000 employees (3.58 hours) and those with 2,001-3,000 employees (3.40 hours), as well as in business services (3.42 hours) and telecoms (3.68 hours).

In total, poor DEX wastes 5.55 hours each week of a single knowledge worker's time. And that time adds up enormously in a workforce of thousands of employees. IT and HR leaders must act fast to cut this waste and reduce the impact of negative DEX, particularly at a time when negative economic headwinds are circling.

Knowledge workers **waste 2.72 hours per week** due to a lack of the right technology



Knowledge workers **waste 2.83 hours per week** due to technology that doesn't work



Total time wasted per week 5.55 hours



The human consequences of poor DEX

The consequences of badly executed DEX for businesses' productivity and profitability are serious, as this report has outlined. But the impact on the workforce is equally concerning. Across the board, the data on how DEX affects individuals has worsened. More knowledge workers say that poor DEX has reduced their job satisfaction now (43%) than in 2021 (38%) and more say it has made them want to leave their job (29%) than in 2021 (18%).

Bad digital experiences make routine work tasks take longer. A lot longer in many cases. Employees are working an extra 3.1 weeks a year because of poor digital experiences; a concerning increase of almost a full week on the 2.2 extra weeks identified in 2021.¹

What impact has a poor digital experience had on you as an employee?



Poor digital experiences force knowledge workers to work:

2.6
extra
hours
a week

3.1
extra
weeks
a year

Clearly, this is not sustainable for businesses or employees. These findings should ring alarm bells for HR and IT departments who must take steps to minimize the potential burnout that employees are facing from bad DEX. Analytics from DEX tools are critical here in arming IT teams with data that can objectively measure wellbeing “red flags” such as excessive working hours or out-of-hours working. These insights equip HR teams to identify those individuals at the most risk and take early action.

¹ 3.1 weeks is based on an additional 2.6 hours worked during each 40-hour week over 48 weeks in 2023.



How are IT teams faring?

Knowledge workers' judgement on how IT teams serve them has worsened. Most (62%) respondents feel IT departments don't understand how they work or provide them with a personalized service, an increase on the 49% of respondents who felt the same in 2021.

IT provides a very personalized service and understands the way I work
38%

IT treats most of us the same without understanding how we work as individuals
62%

Knowledge workers have also avoided using new technology, with the situation deteriorating over time. The user experience is deemed not good enough by 40%, a 17-percentage point increase since 2021. And 39% say they haven't received sufficient training, a 22-percentage point increase on 2021.

In the last two years, knowledge workers have avoided using new tools/apps and services for multiple reasons:

The user experience was not good enough – **40%**

Hadn't received sufficient training – **39%**

Already had other similar tools or services that were better – **33%**

They were too hard to use – **30%**

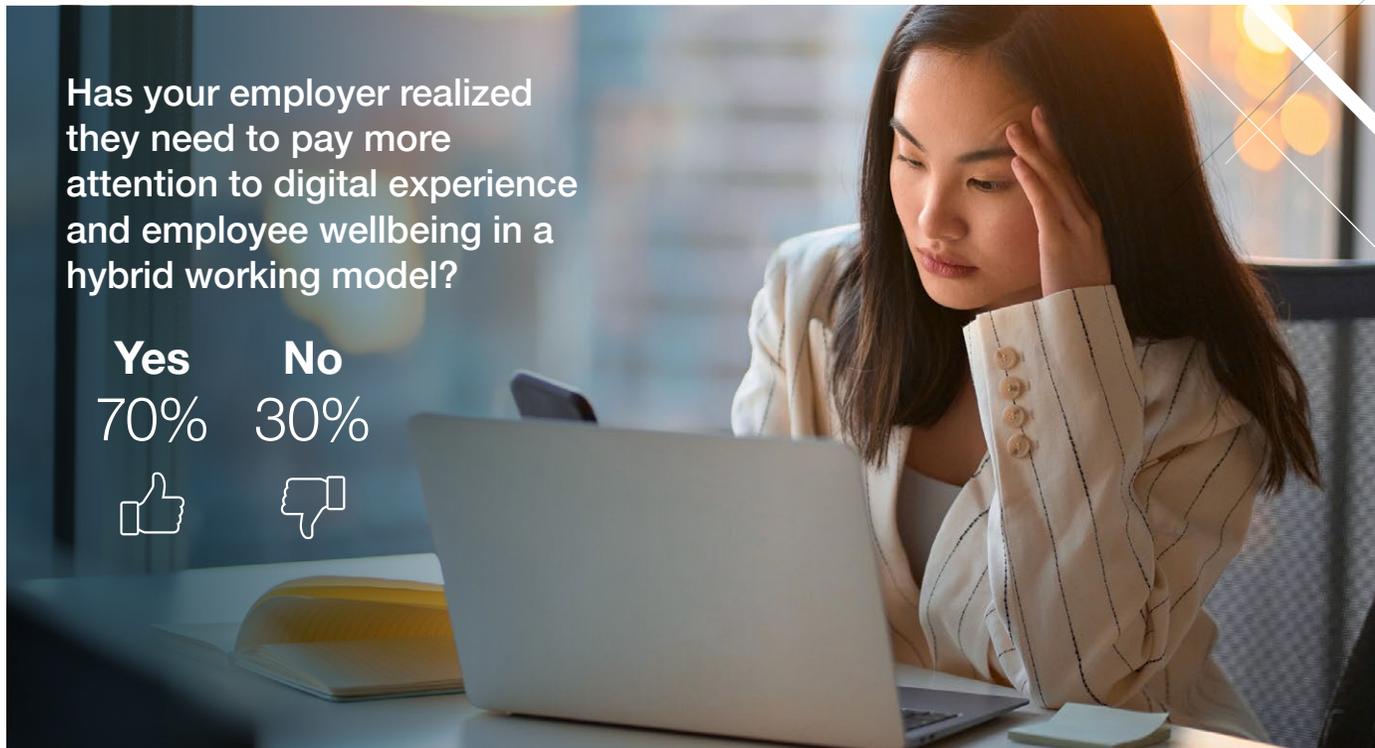
It is likely that higher employee expectations are influencing these answers. Employees that were accepting of sub-par experiences when their organization was in "emergency mode" and work was shifting to digital channels are less forgiving now technology is the primary way work is completed. Similarly, when IT teams were striving to get every employee online quickly, a lot of interaction between IT teams and employees was needed that felt like a personalized service. But that is a very expensive way to deliver IT services.

IT leaders' top two priorities are reducing cost and improving how the service they provide is perceived by the business. They must achieve a balancing act between delivering a cost-effective service that makes employees feel valued. DEX analytics enables IT decision makers to satisfy this balancing act. DEX tools arm IT leaders with near real-time data that lets them analyze at scale how employees use technology, find who is struggling and identify digital champions, without costs spiralling.

Employers are failing to prioritize employee experience

The number of knowledge workers who feel employers are failing to prioritize DEX has also increased. Around a third (30%) of respondents whose organization offer hybrid working say their employer doesn't pay enough attention to experience, compared to 21% in 2021.

The absence of focus on knowledge workers' experiences is underlined by the 59% of respondents who say their employer doesn't have an Employee Experience Manager dedicated to DEX, or they don't know if such a role exists in their company.



59% of knowledge workers say their organization **doesn't have a dedicated Employee Experience Manager** or don't know if such a role exists in their company.

This is likely to change as more organizations begin to recognize the importance of employees digital experience on their satisfaction and success. Importantly, a poor digital experience has an impact employee retention; hybrid working has made it easier than ever for employees to switch jobs.

The emerging Employee Experience Manager (EEM) position, which LinkedIn [predicts](#) will be one of the most in-demand future roles, sees EEMs armed with quantifiable and actionable insights from DEX analytics into all employee interactions, including over digital channels. An EEM then works alongside the IT department or relevant line of business manager to proactively improve DEX – including addressing pain points and areas of digital friction, like application instability and fractured workflows.

The WFH versus RTO debate

This report comes at a time when the Work from Home (WFH) vs Return to Office (RTO) debate is being hotly contested. New [Economic Graph data](#) from LinkedIn finds nearly half (45%) of all roles advertised on its network are hybrid. While that's still a high proportion of roles classed as hybrid, the model itself has gone through a rapid hype cycle in just a few short years. A 2023 global [survey](#) of CEOs by KPMG found that 64% expect staff to be back in the office full-time within three years. And a number of major multinational businesses, including [Amazon](#) and [Zoom](#), have rolled out RTO policies for at least part of the week.

Our research findings underline this shift, with 62% of knowledge workers reporting that their employer has implemented an RTO policy within the last two years. Workers are most commonly being asked to come in for 2 (21%) or 3 (17%) days, though 10% have been asked to return for the full working week.





Has your organization implemented a Return to Office policy within the last two years?

Yes – **62%**

We have always been fully office-based – **22%**

No, fully flexible hybrid working – **5%**

We are a fully remote organization – **11%**

Where an RTO policy has been implemented, knowledge workers have been asked to return to the office for:

1 day a week – **9%**

2 days a week – **21%**

3 days a week – **17%**

4 days a week – **5%**

For the full working week – **10%**



Yet, some knowledge workers are unhappy with this situation and resent being “told” where and when they must work.

35% of knowledge workers resent being told they have to go into the office for a set number of days.

33% of knowledge workers resent being told which days they have to go into the office.

The reason many companies cite for putting in place RTO policies are worries over employee productivity in a hybrid model. The CEO of JP Morgan has [declared](#) himself a work-from-home “skeptic,” and even Mark Zuckerberg [believes](#) that engineers “get more done” when they are in the office. Our survey shows such concerns are widespread. Half (50%) of knowledge workers say their employer has “productivity paranoia” over employees working away from the office.

50% of knowledge workers think their employer is concerned about the level of productivity of employees working remotely or from home.

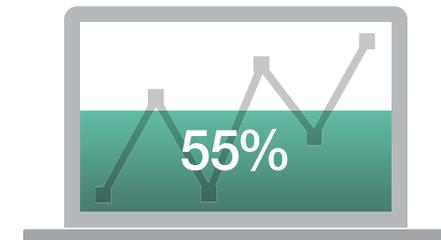
But importantly, the research reveals that it isn't hybrid work itself that makes employees less productive. It's the poor DEX knowledge workers are subjected to that impacts their ability to work effectively. And that applies however an employee works – remotely, hybrid, or in the office. Half (50%) of all knowledge workers in our survey say negative DEX makes them less productive at their job.

50% of all knowledge workers say poor DEX makes them less productive at their job.

Yet this fact hasn't stopped productivity from becoming the lightning rod in the battle between WFH vs RTO. The reality is that productivity has always been challenging for businesses to measure. But it doesn't have to be this way. Sophisticated DEX analytics offer a way to quantify productivity so that whatever policy a business rolls out, decisions are based on evidence within the context of their organization.

Using insights from DEX analytics stops decisions being made on gut feel that may impact employees and the organization negatively. As one Amazon exec has [commented](#) on calling staff back to the office, “I don't have data to back it up, but I know it's better.” DEX analytics arms decision makers with that data. And our research shows that more than half (55%) of all knowledge workers are open to their organization using such software. This feeling is particularly pronounced in the 16-24 age category (64%) and the 35-44 age category (61%).

55% of knowledge workers are open to their employer using DEX software to gather data on working patterns and trends if it enables them to demonstrate they are working efficiently from home.



DEX analytics checklist

What can you measure with sophisticated DEX?

With near-real time data collated from all endpoints and applications across the enterprise, DEX analytics enables IT and HR leaders to create KPIs within the context of their organization. Configurable KPIs provide actionable insights to decision makers to objectively quantify productivity and remove blockers that hold employees back. By correlating these KPIs with office or remote working, Employee Experience Managers can accurately assess the impact of hybrid working on DEX and productivity.

Here are some of the top KPIs that sophisticated DEX analytics can measure...



Application Stability: Determine stability of end-user applications and identify impact on user experience or productivity.



Application Switching: Highlighting potential productivity improvements by showing application switching frequency.



Collaboration Streamlining: Measuring user adoption of tools for communication and collaboration, such as Microsoft Teams, against other products in the estate.



Communication Efficiency: Tracking improvements in communication efficiency achieved by adopting messaging platforms over legacy e-mail.



Meeting Efficiency: Tracking adoption of tools for meetings, for example Microsoft Teams, against other solutions and measuring reduction in meeting numbers and duration.



Out of Hours Working: Identifying users working outside of normal office hours to highlight risk of adverse impact on employee wellbeing.

Conclusion: Objectively measure, optimize and improve DEX

The debate over working from home or the office is set to continue for some time. But it's something of a smokescreen for the fundamental issues that the data in this report has revealed. Many organizations today are failing to deliver a digital experience that empowers knowledge workers to be productive and efficient, regardless of their location. And it's this failing that needs to be addressed.

There is a clear need for a reassessment of how organizations measure digital experience and how it impacts employees' productivity. How teams are managed and measured must evolve as the work landscape transforms. The solution is DEX analytics that deliver deep observability to analyze employee experience in near real-time. Moreover, employers have an opportunity to implement DEX now because employees are willing to accept DEX as a way of injecting objectivity into the RTO debate.

IT and HR teams gain visibility with DEX analytics that allows them to set KPIs within the context of their organization and to objectively assess employee productivity. This visibility also means IT and HR can identify productivity blockers, so experiences can be optimized and improved. With this approach, employers can eliminate the more than five hours a week that this research has revealed knowledge workers are currently wasting because of sub-standard digital experiences.

The Acumen logo consists of the word "Acumen" in a sans-serif font, followed by a small orange square icon with a white triangle pointing towards the top-right corner.

Scalable Software's DEX management platform, [Acumen](#), collates and distills data from every endpoint to deliver insights to IT and HR leaders. Acumen helps businesses deliver exceptional employee experiences whether staff WFH or RTO, by building flexible, work-from-anywhere digital workplaces.

With a DEX deep-dive from Acumen, you can measure and proactively optimize experiences to keep your workforce productive.

About the survey

This research was commissioned by Scalable Software and conducted by independent research company, Censuswide. Fieldwork was conducted in November 2023. Respondents consist of 2,005 UK knowledge workers who use some type of IT in their work, in companies of between 500-5,000 employees.

About Scalable...

Scalable Software has more than 15 years of experience delivering actionable intelligence on how employees interact with technology. Its Acumen platform enables IT and HR leaders to optimize productivity and Digital Employee Experience (DEX) in today's hybrid working environment. Coupling DEX observability with Key Performance Indicators, Acumen enables decision makers in the C-Suite, IT and HR to gain objective evidence of how hybrid and remote working models are performing, and deep visibility into employee productivity and engagement. Acumen provides insights into work patterns and user journeys to streamline disconnected tactical solutions and drive better ways of working consistently. Armed with this knowledge, organizations can optimize DEX; improve employee engagement and productivity; and reduce complexity and cost.

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