

Remote Work in 2021:

# Catching Up to the Evolution of Enterprise Communications and Collaboration

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*Employees Share Perspectives on Working  
from Home, Workplace Productivity, and the  
Future of Work*



# Catching Up to the Evolution of Enterprise Communications and Collaboration

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# On Your Mark, Get Set...

Completing a successful race requires a plan and foresight. Runners know that to win, they must train, diet, and push towards a pace that matches the distance before them — whether it's a 100-yard dash or an ultramarathon.

Throughout the events of 2020, enterprises have faced a similar level of demand — with rapidly changing demands forcing them into an intense race for which few were prepared. Many workplace trends that were previously evolving steadily have fast-tracked to shape a new present reality. The population of work from home employees spiked overnight. The adoption of workstream **collaboration tools including Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Slack grew by more than 50 percent in a matter of months**. Enterprises and their employees had no option but to adapt quickly and embrace an entirely new way of working, collaborating, and communicating.

With little time or resources to train for this mad dash, enterprises and their employees are still running to catch up. To better understand the course ahead, Unify Square, the leading monitoring, management, and governance software and services provider for Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack platforms, surveyed enterprise employees about collaboration and communications in the workplace. The findings help reveal insights about what's working and what's not, and how enterprises can adjust to keep pace with continually accelerating and evolving trends.





# The Starting Line

Like runners preparing for a race, it's important for enterprises to look back, at previous wins and losses, before charging forward. In terms of the state of the workplace before the pandemic, it's clear that **most enterprises had yet to widely allow employees to work remotely** or embrace the systems and policies needed to enable a productive work-from-home experience.



## The Pre-Pandemic Workplace

Not long ago, working from home was more of an exception than the rule for most employees, and not all received equal treatment in this regard.

**60%** Nearly 60% of enterprise employees were not offered the option of remote work.

**10%** Of those that were allowed to work from home only 10% were fully remote.

**13%** An additional 13% had occasional work from home privileges.



## Pre-Pandemic Communication Habits

Employees have traditionally preferred email and in-person meetings to stay in touch with their colleagues. These were the teams' top modes of communication while still in the office.



**92%** Prefer email



**50%** Prefer in-person conference room meetings



**44%** Prefer text messaging



**28%** Prefer video calls

**63%** 18-24-year-old workers who frequently use chat via Teams or Slack

**20%** Employees age 55 and older who frequently use chat via Teams or Slack

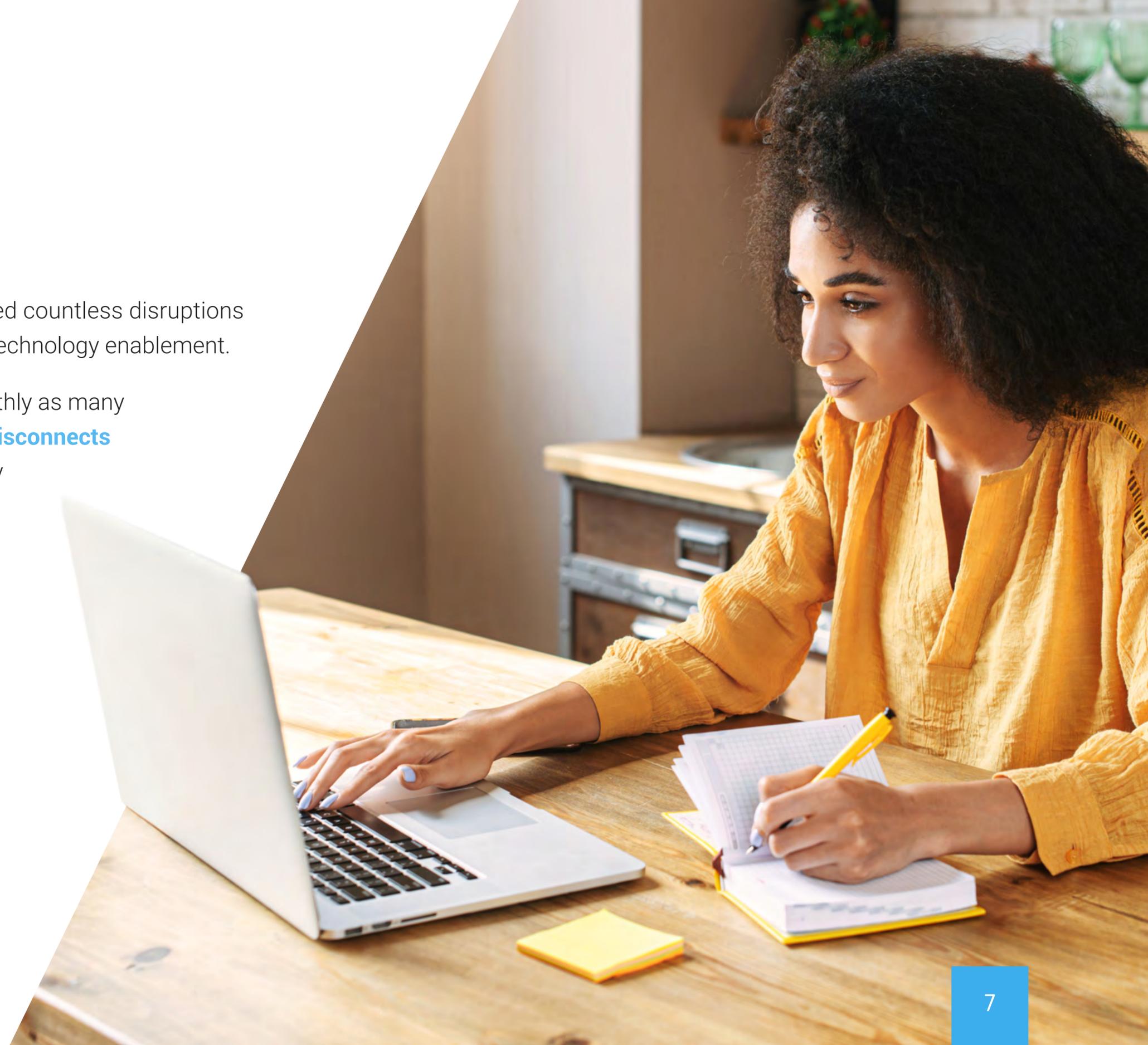


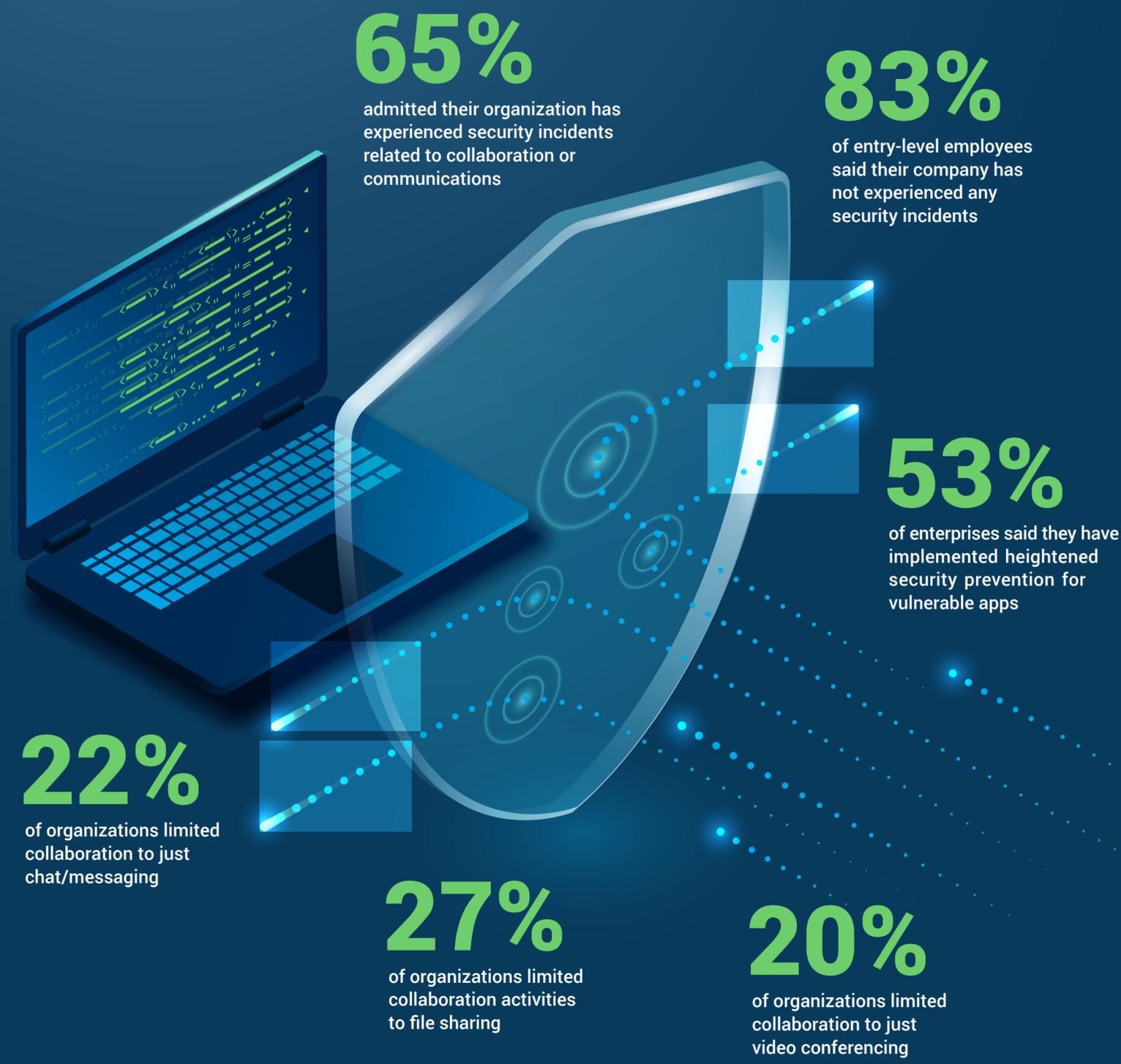


# False Starts

The sudden departure from traditional workspaces created countless disruptions and concerns across logistics, security, productivity, and technology enablement.

Unsurprisingly, the shift to remote work didn't go as smoothly as many would have hoped, and **enterprises suffered significant disconnects between company leadership and employees.** The survey revealed several key challenge areas and shortcomings.





## Security and Governance Blind Spots

According to Nemertes Research, **58% of enterprises ranked risk assessment as the top security and compliance capability they need to effectively manage communications.**

The research also found organizations are often getting their baseline security functions from unified communications platforms, yet are also willing to pay a premium for additional compliance management.

According to the Unify Square survey:

- Among owner, C-level, and executive-level respondents, **65%** admitted their organization has experienced security incidents related to collaboration or communications, while **83%** of entry-level employees said their company has not experienced any security incidents.
- Despite expert warnings of the security vulnerabilities in workplace collaboration and communication tools, only **53%** of enterprises said they have implemented heightened security prevention for these apps.
- Restrictions on collaboration applications have been minimal, with only **27%** limiting collaboration activities to file sharing, **22%** to chat/messaging, and **20%** to video conferencing.



## Employee Support

Among respondents overall, **44% said their organization has not taken any steps to help facilitate teamwork in a remote environment.** This may be a missed opportunity for improving engagement, as employees identified numerous personal challenges they've experienced since working remotely, including:

- Missing the routine of being in the office (**43%**)
- Collaborating with colleagues in person (**41%**)
- Distractions at home (**35%**)
- Juggling personal duties on top of work (**32%**)

It's also clear that different age groups have different needs when it comes to employer support.

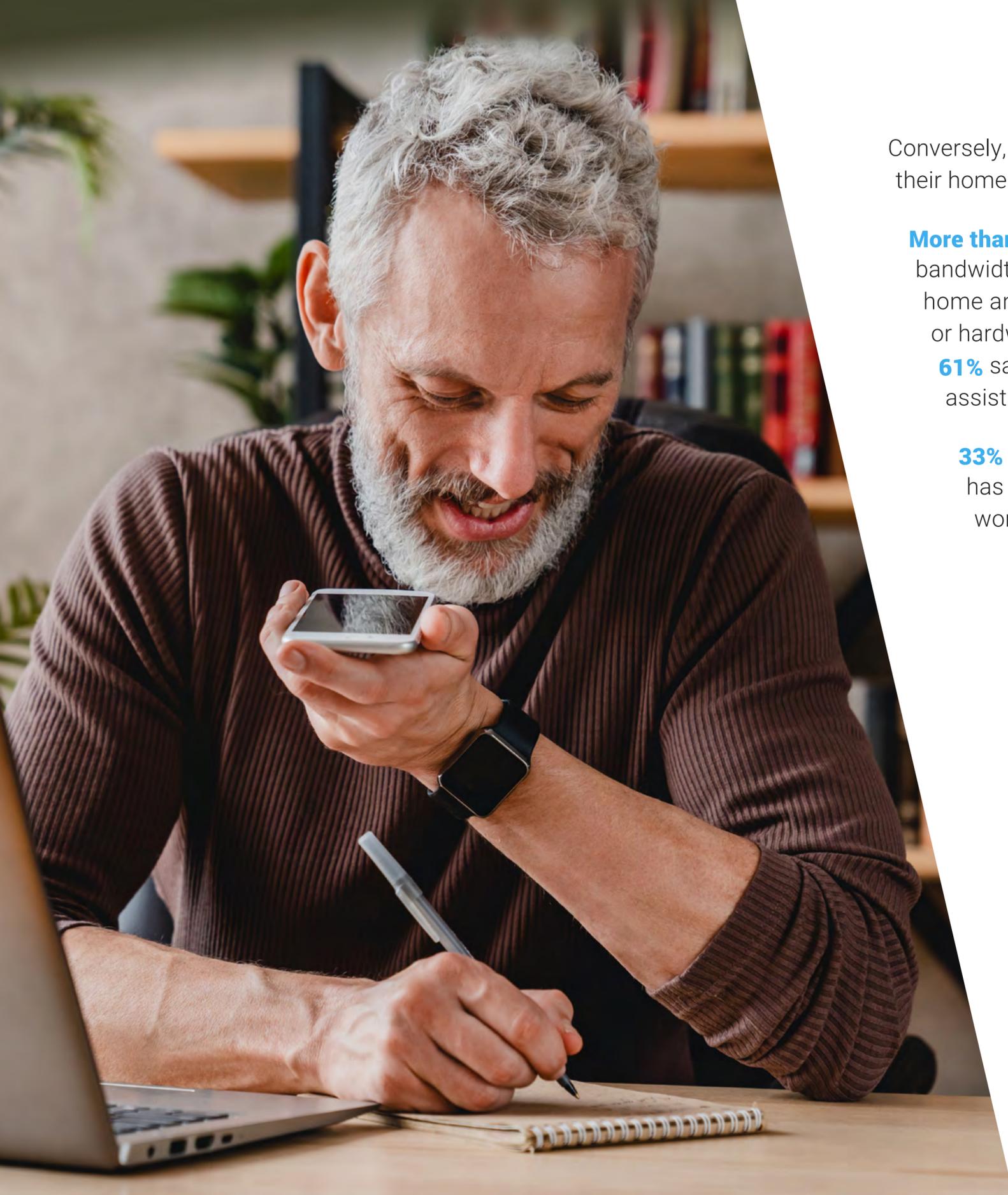
**Employees under 24 years old** were less prepared for working from home than their older colleagues, with **42%** saying it took roughly one month to get their home-based office set up at the same quality as their in-office workspace.



## Crazy Calls

**14% of all respondents and 22% of those age 65 and older** admitted to taking work calls from unconventional locations including a bathroom, on a boat, in a store, and from a child's sporting event.





Conversely, **40% of employees age 55 and older** said their home office worked great from day one.

**More than one-third of employees** have increased bandwidth to their home internet since working from home and **43%** have purchased new equipment or hardware (e.g. monitor, headset, webcam), but **61%** said their employer did not offer any financial assistance to do so.

**33% of employees ages 65+** believe collaboration has become much less efficient since the shift to working from home.

**“It took a month to get my home office set up at the same quality as my office workspace.”**

– 42% of employees under 24 years old

**“Collaboration has become much less efficient since the shift to working from home.”**

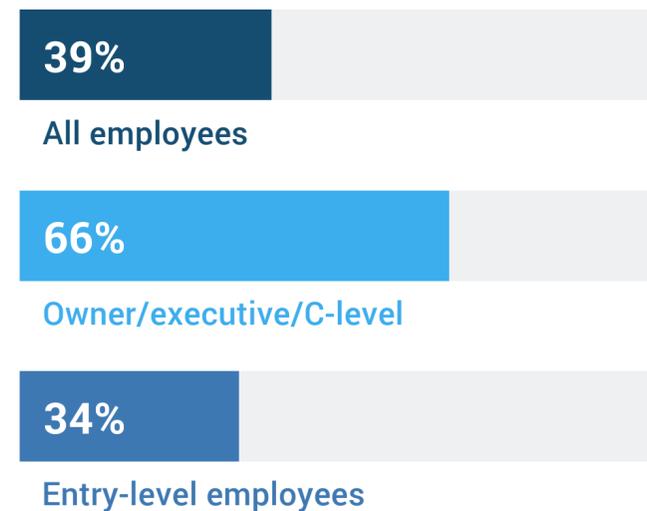
– 33% of employees age 65 and older

**“My home office worked great from day one.”**

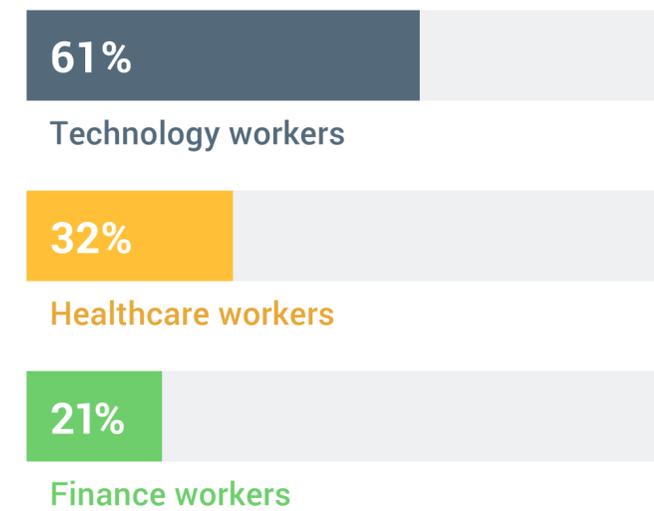
– 40% of employees age 55 and older

## Stress Levels on the Rise

### Reported increases in stress by job level:



### Reported increases in stress by industry:



Since switching to a remote work model, **39%** of employees say their stress levels have increased.

- **Nearly two-thirds** of owner, executive, and C-level employees stated that their work-related stress has increased since switching to remote work, as opposed to only **34%** of entry-level employees feeling increased stress.
- By industry, **61%** of technology workers cite an increase in stress, while only **32%** of healthcare workers and **21%** of finance workers feel the same.

## Distractions Abound

Since moving to a remote work model, employees have experienced the following distractions while on a conference call:





# Picking Up *SPEED*

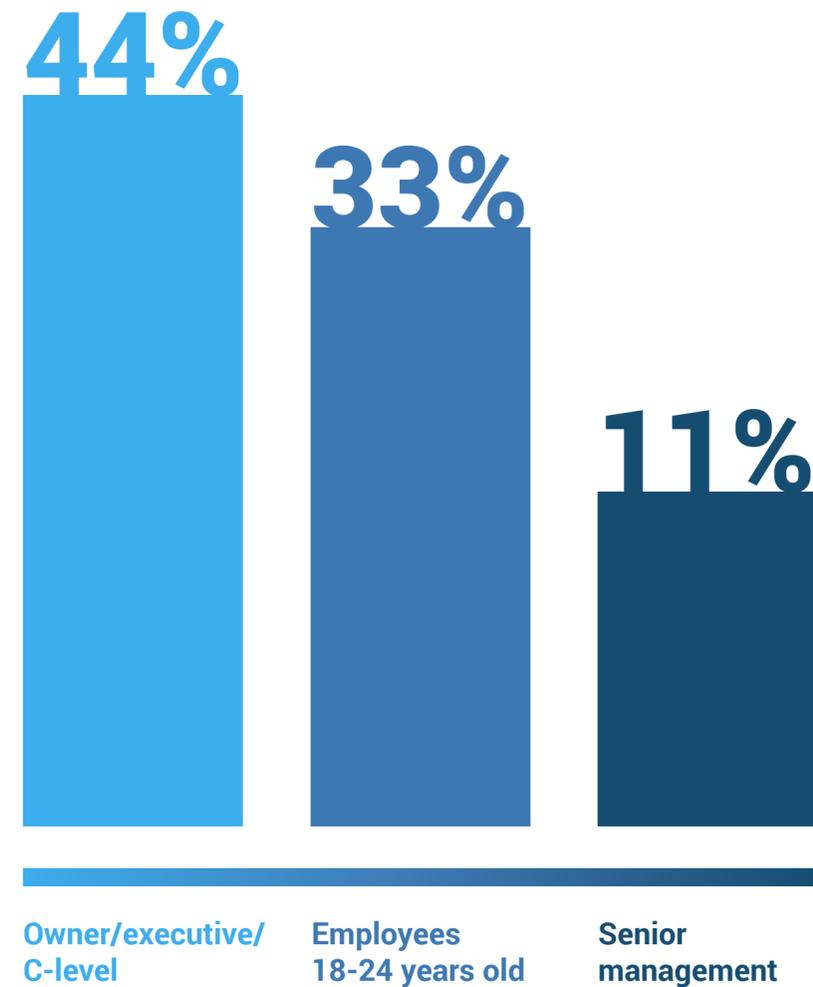
As more people have settled in to remote work, enterprises have made some headway in providing the technical, managerial, and productivity support employees need to thrive in the new workplace.

**Nearly 30% of employees** said their organizations have put new policies in place to facilitate more frequent one-on-one check-ins and have created new intra-company social media groups, email updates, or other related communications channel enhancements. The survey responses also indicate additional opportunities for improvement in helping employees remain productive despite a lack of face-to-face collaboration.



## Home IT Support = More Success

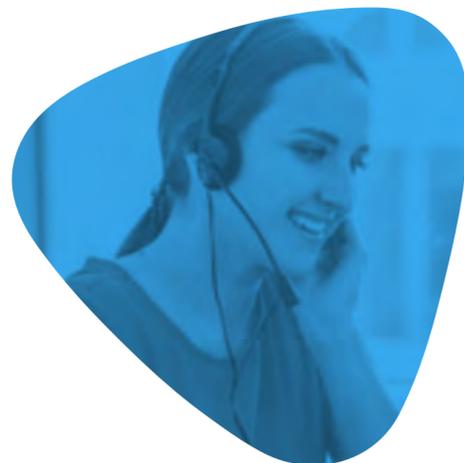
In the Nemertes Research study *Visual Communications and Collaboration: 2020-21*, researchers reported that success groups—defined by above mean success in at least two areas of cost savings, revenue increase, and productivity gain—provided significantly more at-home IT support for employees. Support included wi-fi assessments, voice and video quality monitoring, ISP selection and lighting guidance. Success group companies on average achieved a **23.8% improvement in productivity** and **nearly \$400,000 in revenue gains**.



**44%** of owner, executive, and C-level respondents and **33%** of employees 18-24 years old believe collaboration with teammates has become much more efficient during remote work, while only **11%** of senior management agree.



Out of those who share a workspace with one or more roommates, **55%** feel that their productivity has decreased since working remotely, and **32%** of those who have been sharing a workspace with one or more children doing remote learning feel that their productivity has decreased.



Out of those who don't share a workspace with anyone, **33%** feel their productivity has increased and **44%** feel their productivity has stayed the same.



## Productivity and Collaboration Go Hand-in-Hand

Roughly

**50%**

*of enterprise tech workers believe that there is a higher set of standards for productivity within their company since working remotely.*

Fully

**66%**

*of enterprise employees believe that work is an outcome, not a physical location, yet nearly 20% of workers say that management does not yet embrace this idea of outcome-based work.*



*In the Enterprise and Customer Engagement Management study, Nemertes Research found that more than **25%** of enterprises that had adopted new collaboration and communication apps had not integrated them with their existing systems, but more than **80%** have plans to integrate all applications that have been added to support remote workers.*



# Keeping a Winning Pace

It's not too late for enterprises to hit their stride and understand what their employees need to continue working remotely. Fewer people are making conventional phone calls, and while email continues to dominate — **it was ranked as the primary mode of workplace communication among 92% of respondents** — employees are also embracing video conferencing and chat at an increasing rate.

Employers will need to make these functions seamless to facilitate collaboration and help employees remain productive. Also, with many employees enjoying the newfound flexibility of working from home, more will begin to expect that their employers continue to provide remote work opportunities long term.



## Enabling Work from Anywhere

# 72%

of companies rolled out **at least one** new collaboration app to support remote employees this year.

# 22%

The frequency of office desk calls has dropped by **22%**, while conference calls (including video and non-video) increased by **16%**.

# 45-54

Employees in the **45-54-year-old** range were the only ones not to rank video among their top modalities after email, preferring texting and chat over video conferencing.

# <50%

**More than half** of organizations surveyed added Zoom and **43%** rolled-out Microsoft Teams.



## Modalities Are Evolving

Pre COVID



Email

# 92%

Post COVID



Email

# 92%

In-Person Meetings



# 50%

Video Calls



# 49%

Text Messaging



# 44%

Chat



# 53%

## WFH vs The Office

In a recent World Economic Forum article, Bill Gates predicted that, "over 30% of days in the office will go away." Microsoft also announced plans to allow employees to work remotely permanently, and will offer a hybrid model with employees working in-office part-time.

55%

of employees believe that with the collaboration apps and tech they have in place, they are able to be successful working fully remote indefinitely.

>33%

Less than one-third of employees said they would choose to return to the office full time.





# The Finish Line

**Can we work from home forever?** It's a loaded question, but regardless of the answer, the workplace has permanently changed. Enterprises need to prioritize governance, security, and compliance and recognize that traditional modalities for collaboration and communication may need to be retired or refreshed.

Adjusting to new technological needs, addressing employee challenges, and leveraging the ways communication has evolved will ensure enterprises can go the distance toward fulfilling employee expectations for the ideal workplace of the future.





## About Unify Square

Unify Square's software and services optimize and enhance the world's largest collaboration and communication deployments, helping businesses manage and secure their meetings, chats, and calls. Unify Square solutions have delivered value to more than six million collaboration seats, in over 300 enterprises across more than 50 countries, and in most major industry verticals.

When enterprises made the sudden shift in 2020 to supporting tens of thousands of remote employees around the world, our software, consulting, and managed services supported a seamless transition for IT professionals and end users. As the remote work landscape continues to evolve and introduce new collaboration and communication challenges, Unify Square is keeping a pulse on the tools, capabilities, and services enterprises and their employees need most.

[WWW.UNIFY SQUARE.COM](http://WWW.UNIFY SQUARE.COM)

### Methodology

This survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey in November 2020, with a total of 556 respondents. Participants were full-time workers at companies with more than 500 employees.