COVID-19 Technology and Business Process Survey

ABBYY

Table of contents

In this research

When the pandemic forced people to work from home, many businesses and IT departments suddenly had a unique pressure on them and renewed sense of urgency to support remote workers while ensuring they had the right technology to do so. Organizations quickly discovered that it is critical to know where their inefficiencies lie and how to fix them and realized that while digital workers are beneficial for automating manual tasks, they were not the end-all to improving the overall work experience.

This report investigates work from home (WFH) challenges, whether remote workers felt prepared once WFH policies went into place, what businesses did to help employees cope from a technology perspective, how employees' experiences influenced their perception of how processes worked and need to be fixed, and how technology will continue to play a major role into 2021 and beyond.

Methodology

The global COVID-19 Technology and Business Processes Survey was sponsored by ABBYY and executed by Opinium Research with 4,000 office workers in the U.S., UK, France, and Germany. Respondents represented over 20 industries including Financial Services/Banking, Education, Healthcare, Government, Insurance, Logistics, Transportation, Real Estate, Marketing/PR/Advertising, and more.

Opinium Research executed the survey in November 2020.

This report revealed average global results.

Survey participants were from organizations with 50+ employees and were located in the U.S., UK, France, and Germany.

Definitions

Communication & collaboration tools refer to tools that can enable improved communication and collaboration within the workplace, such as Slack or Microsoft Teams.

Automation intelligence tools help businesses make a decision from data and enable the user to draw insights, such as chatbots, artificial intelligence, and process mining software.

Intelligent Document Processing (IDP) refers to the automatic digitization of documents and communications.

Monitoring software is software that monitors how staff complete tasks, such as task mining.

Task mining captures and analyzes how people interact with systems through recordings and snapshots, helping companies identify and have a deeper understanding of what employees actually do when they perform a particular task and identify the common actions. This data is then used to improve processes and guide automation efforts and provides a more in-depth view of the processes. It allows companies to monitor how tasks are performed, aids automation efforts, and ensures those automation efforts are aimed at where the greatest productivity gains can be made.

Process mining is software that helps organizations easily capture information from enterprise transaction systems and provides detailed, data-driven information about how key processes are performing. It creates event logs as work is done: an order is received, a product is delivered, a payment is made. The logs make visible how computer-mediated work is really happening, including who did it, how long it takes, and how it departs from the average. Process analytics create key performance indicators for the process, which enables a company to focus on the priority steps to improve.

Robots can include **“digital workers”** (software designed to model and emulate human job roles by performing end-to-end job activities) and intelligent automation technologies that replicate and supplement the productivity of human workers, sometimes around-the-clock. This could include sorting or classifying data, flagging issues or problems, digital data entry, paperless administrative tasks, prompting you to respond to emails or do tasks (i.e., Microsoft Cortana, Slackbot), and more.

Data analysis and insights can include Tableau, Power BI, or Qlikview.

Business processes are defined steps and workflows for completing a business function, such as accounts payable, onboarding a new customer, triaging a patient in an emergency room, delivering goods and services, etc. This could include working with multiple systems, platforms, and databases, and involve many people.

COVID-19 challenges

Three quarters of office workers have experienced challenges from working during the COVID-19 pandemic

Just under one in four (74%) say that they have experienced challenges at work during the current global pandemic. This figure rises as high as 83% for those in France and falls to 63% for those in the United States. This is a pattern reflected in Anglo countries vs mainland Europe workers overall where 69% of those in English speaking nations experienced lockdown challenges compared to four in five (80%) of those in non-English speaking.

There were also some notable differences by age. For instance, those aged 18-34 were considerably more likely to report challenges than those aged 55+ (87% vs 65%), rising as high as 89% of 18-34-year-old SDMs.

In terms of the challenges faced, collaboration was regarded as the most significant difficulty (36%), followed by motivation (27%) and productivity (25%). Again, there are some notable differences among the challenges experienced. For instance, four in ten (39%) of those 18-34 report challenges with motivation compared to one in five (19%) of those aged 55+.

As the survey results show, organizations continue to face rising challenges when it comes to quickly and accurately processing content such as documents, forms, images, and email communications. It can require an enormous amount of manual work to find specific information in a document, perform data entry, and route the document for review and approval.

Top reasons for challenges

27%

Feeling isolated working from home

23%

Difficulty in working with colleagues to create solutions

25%

Not having access to information to complete tasks

20%

Not having the right tools to work at home

Not having access to information a significant challenge reported among workers

Overall, 40% reported not having access to needed information or having a lack of information as a challenge, and 32% reported not having the right tools as a workplace challenge. There were some notable differences by age within this, for example, 37% of those aged 18-34 agreeing that they did not have the right tools for the job compared to 27% of those aged 55+. With respect to various sectors, those in Education were most likely to report not having the right tools with two in five (41%) saying so, followed by those in IT and computing (38%) and those in government roles (36%).

Additionally, the feeling of isolation was reported the highest (27%) cause of struggle, followed by access to information (25%) or having the right toolset (20%).

65% say business processes have worked for the most part, but

63% say that they could be simplified

Appreciation for business processes

Overall, most office workers reported an appreciation for business processes in assisting in the workspace. A majority agreed that they mostly work; conversely though, a similar substantial portion agreed business processes have made their job more challenging. A quarter (25%) agree that business processes have made them want to leave their job. This figure is highest among French office workers (32%) and senior decision makers overall (32%), and rising as high as 43% for French decision makers.

% say that "business processes..."

Common tech adopted by office workers

As the survey results show, organizations continue to face rising challenges when it comes to quickly and accurately processing content such as documents, forms, images, and email communications. It can require an enormous amount of manual work to find specific information in a document, perform data entry, and route the document for review and approval. The survey revealed that 76% of tools used to help with processes, digitizing the automation and content within paper and onboarding new clients, were deemed successful for respondents, including tools for monitoring employees' tasks.

This points to the growing trend of many organizations that are now turning to technologies like Content Intelligence, process mining, and task mining to support their digital transformation efforts and discover and address the inefficiencies of business processes in order to optimize the productivity of their staff and meet customer expectations.

In order to meet new demands, businesses need to know where their inefficiencies lie and how they can fix them before considering new automation tools. It's exactly why there is a surge in leveraging Process Intelligence tools that also encapsulate how workers complete their tasks. Additionally, incorporating AI into documents allows digital co-workers to augment human intelligence for more timely and smarter business decisions.

Top three tools employees wish for to make their jobs easier:

70%

communications

43%

task monitoring

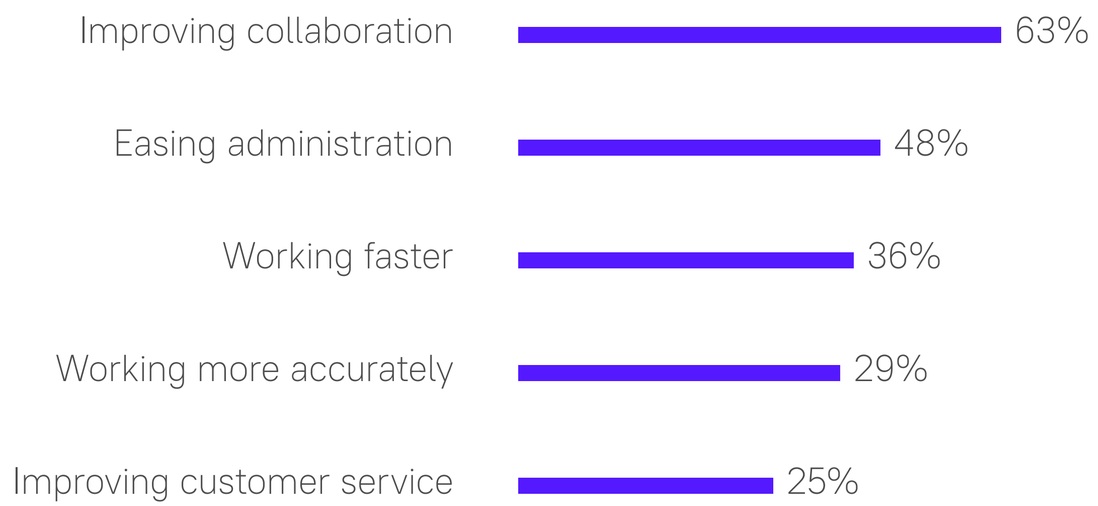
39%

AI

82%

of those who have used smart technology say that it has helped them

Of the 80% of workers who used the smart technologies (programs and technology that do the thinking for workers) listed, four in five report that they helped them in some way in their day-to-day work. The most common way that they assisted in work was to work more efficiently.



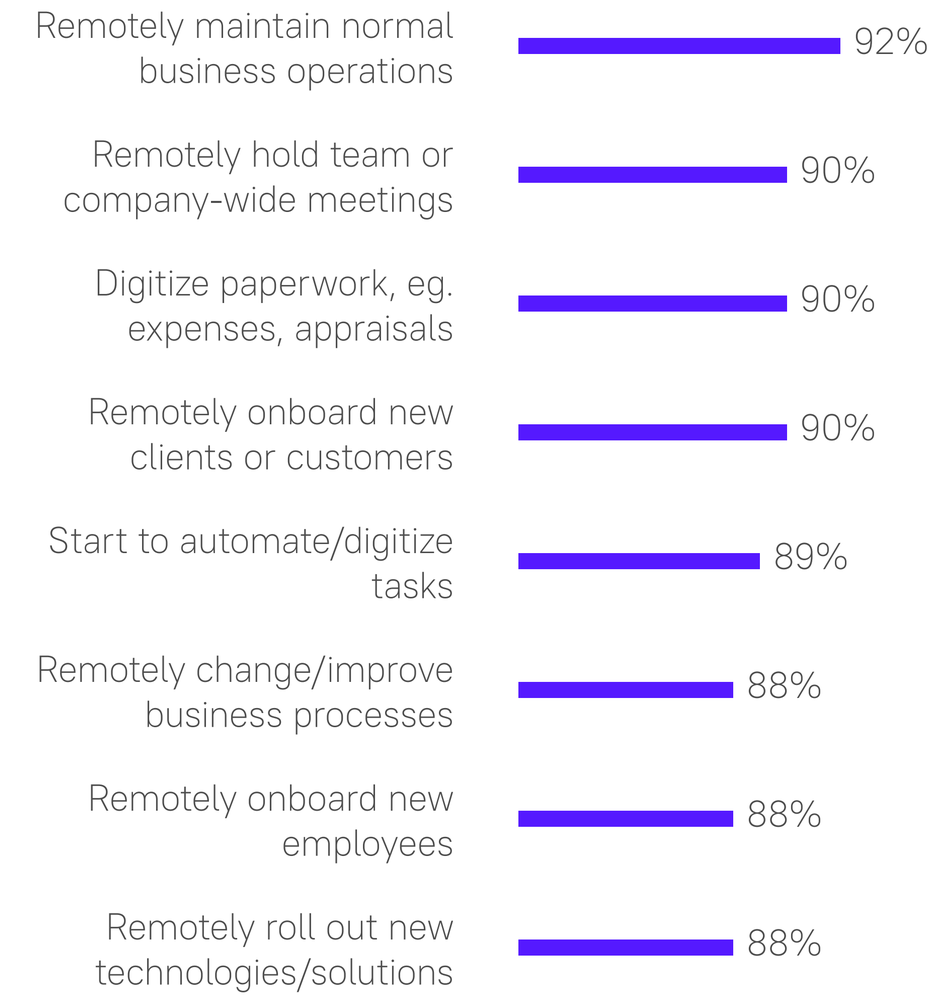
While 13% said that such tools have not helped them before, a further 5% agreed that such tools could be useful with further training.

64% started using new technologies during lockdown

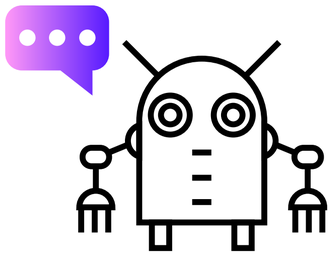
Most office workers were introduced to new technologies and processes during the COVID-19 lockdown for the first time. They were used for ensuring business continuity for a variety of processes including meetings, digitizing documents, automating tasks, and onboarding new employees. The most common was holding virtual meetings, with 27% doing this for the first time.

Of those who newly started to use these types of processes this year, the majority were regarded as very successful. 90% regarded holding virtual team meetings as successful, and the same proportion agreed that digitizing paperwork and remotely onboarding new clients was overall smooth.

% who thought each newly-introduced process was successful



Impact of Digital Workers



Almost half (46%) of office workers are currently incorporating digital workers into their working routine. Interestingly, only 40% report that they are beneficial to them, and 15% said they are very beneficial. Workers in France were most likely to report that such tools were useful to them with half (50%) agreeing so, and a similar proportion of SDMs overall (57%) also agreeing. Of those who use such technologies, the vast majority (89%) report that they are easy to use.

46%

use digital workers in their workspace

Of those who find digital workers useful, 34% say that they are beneficial in sorting and classifying data and documents, rising to 42% of those working in government. It is also particularly useful for workers with certain responsibilities. For instance, 48% of those responsible for inventory and 43% responsible for claims processing. Similarly, 47% of those in legal services say that digitizing paperwork is useful to them compared to 33% on average.

Around a third (30%) say that such tools helped them work more efficiently, with a further 28% saying they improved collaboration, and a quarter (26%) saying it improved their productivity.

69% of those not using digital workers think they could be beneficial

The majority of office workers not currently using digital workers can see areas where they could be of benefit to them. A third (29%) agreed that such workers could help them work more efficiently, while 21% said they could boost productivity (40% overall agreeing with either of them). Within areas of the business where office workers would like to see digital workers, 32% said that they would like to use them to digitize paperwork, 30% would use them for prompts, and 29% would use them for classification purposes.

Employees who don’t have a digital colleague yet estimate they would save an average of 32 hours per month using a robot.

Generational impact

Age mattered when it came to how senior-level decision makers perceived challenges at work. There was a notable difference between executives under the age of 35 and over 54. This suggests that while younger executives may be digital natives, there is less tolerance for disruptions in workflow, and more skepticism among older executives.

61% of executives under 34 agreed that processes made their job more challenging. Only 36% of executives over 54 agreed with this, along with 54% of those between the ages of 35-54.

85% of respondents under the age of 34 agreed that processes wasted their time, while only 20% over 54 agreed with this, as well as 45% of those between the ages of 35-54.

55% of those under 34 agreed that processes made them want to leave their job, while only 11% of the majority across ages agreed processes could be simplified (68% of those under 34, 70% of those between 35-54, and 54% of those over 54). 39% of respondents between the ages of 35-54 agreed.

Generational perspective

The reasons why business processes did not perform well differed by age groups as well.

This data suggests younger executives want to have more insight and control of business processes.

There was not enough information on business processes

- 60% of executives under 34 agreed; 26% of those over 54 agreed; while 35-54 were more in the middle, with 47% agreeing.

Not enough visibility on progress of processes

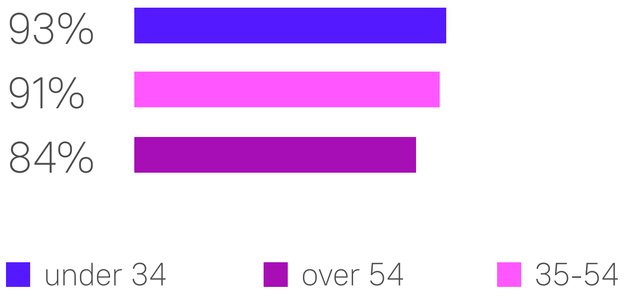
- 61% of those under 34 agreed; 25% of those over 54 agreed; 35-54 were, again, mainly in the middle, with 49% agreeing.

under 34 35-54 over 54

The use of smart technology by the ages

Younger executives consistently used smart technology more in their daily roles compared to executives aged over 55.

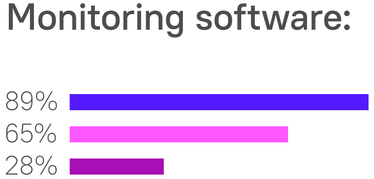
However, all age groups agreed that smart technologies helped them achieve their goals.



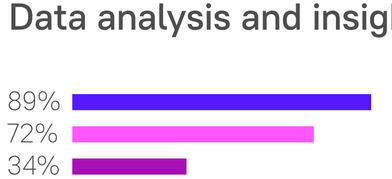
Digital assistants:

Communications & collaboration tools:

Monitoring software:



Data analysis and insights:



Mobile productivity apps:

Team management software:

Digital workers for all

Of those using digital workers & intelligent automation, older people are seeing more benefits:

Executives should focus on empowering workers with the right technology, while showing them benefits they can gain from using them.

Younger people found the tech made their work more complex (23%) vs 17% of those between the ages of 35-54, and just 14% of those over 55.

Younger people also found the tech increased their workload (21%) vs just 11% of those over 55.

Older people had more efficiency gains – 35% said it helped them work more efficiently vs just 23% of those between 18-34.

Of those not yet using the technologies, younger people think they would have more impact (79%) vs 66% of those over 55 and 71% of those between 35-54.

under 34 35-54 over 54

Digital workers for all

Do you use digital workers in your day-to-day work?

Conclusion

The survey validated that the acceleration of digitally transforming operations and equipping the workforce with new tools was rampant. The survey also showed that despite the introduction of new digital tools, it was not the cure-all for improving workers' day-to-day workflows, productivity, and mental health. Organizations need to understand their processes and how workers interact with them to identify bottlenecks, variants, and duplications prior to automation efforts. This can be done by using Process Intelligence solutions, including the use of task mining tools, to identify exactly how employees interact with systems and applications.

2020 forced modernization of operations for an increasingly remote paradigm of doing business. Digital transformation will continue to be imperative as we use more technology to work from home, collaborate with peers, service customers, and move more of our lives online and remotely, even in the post-COVID world.

Additionally, incorporating AI into documents allows digital co-workers to augment human intelligence for more timely and smarter business decisions.

About ABBYY

ABBYY is a Digital Intelligence company

ABBYY empowers organizations to gain a complete understanding of their business processes and the content that fuels them with its Digital Intelligence platform. ABBYY technologies are used by more than 5,000 companies, including many of the Fortune 500, and is recognized for its leadership in Intelligent Document Processing (IDP) and Process Discovery & Mining for driving significant impact where it matters most: customer experience, effectiveness, profitability, and competitive advantage. ABBYY is a global company with offices in 14 countries. For more information, visit www.abbyy.com

ABBYY