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# Understanding The Role Of Modernized PCs In Hybrid Work Environment Optimization

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## Executive Summary

As the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions loosen and offices reopen, companies want to get back to business as usual — but the new working environment is radically different from before. The new normal of office work embraces a greater blend of remote employees and office workers. While this added flexibility is great for employees, it introduces several challenges for business leaders to consider as they best enable employees to succeed in this new environment. Many PCs are not optimized for this hybrid work setup, and employers need to take inventory of where investments should be made to ensure that employees are properly connected with the right hardware, software, and peripherals to enable effective work in this new hybrid work environment.

In June 2021, Microsoft commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate device and infrastructure requirements for businesses in a post-pandemic, hybrid work environment. Forrester conducted an online survey with 1,733 business decision-makers in IT, HR, and line-of-business roles in 11 countries to explore this topic.

We found that business and IT leaders recognize that the right devices can help support a hybrid-work environment, and they are committed to making greater investments in PCs to meet that need. With these PC improvements, business and IT leaders expect to empower employees with the right tools for a flexible and collaborative work environment, regardless of where they are working from. This will lead to greater productivity and improved customer experiences.

**Key Findings** →

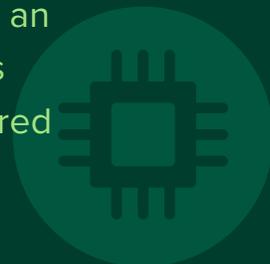


## Key Findings

**The top post-pandemic employee-related priorities all focus on supporting hybrid work.** Business leaders expect that over 50% of their workforce will remain in remote or hybrid work status (i.e., a mix of in-office and remote) post-pandemic.



**Over 75% of decision-makers responsible for employee equipment plan to increase investments in PCs/laptops over the next couple years.** Of those increasing budgets, there is an expected 2.25 times increase in the total number companies substantially increasing PC budgets (by 10% or more) compared to the past two years



**Over 70% of those surveyed believe that significant to moderate improvements to PC quality are needed to support hybrid work more successfully.** Only 32% of respondents strongly agree that their current devices allow employees to be highly mobile and flexible with their work, and just 30% strongly agree that their current devices are best in class for hybrid work.



**PCs must have the right features, security, and supporting processes to drive desired business outcomes.** The right types of PCs that are secured properly and equipped with the right features and peripherals to support hybrid work increase employee productivity, enhance collaboration, and provide greater flexibility for meeting various working styles. These benefits promote greater business success. As companies invest more in improving their device fleets with more modern devices, the responsibility to secure and manage device fleets becomes easier and more streamlined.



## Post-Pandemic Business Priorities Focus On Enabling Hybrid Work

Even as the pandemic recedes in some regions, business leaders expect that over 50% of their workforce will remain in remote or hybrid work situations. This is a significant change from where most companies were prior to the pandemic and requires an adjustment in business priorities to make this new work environment successful.

The top post-pandemic employee related priorities focus on supporting hybrid work with improving the availability of computer peripherals to make work easier, promoting more flexible work arrangements, and improving the quality of employees' computers. Before the pandemic, the focus was on ensuring proper data access and security, increasing software tools, and improving collaboration (see Figure 1). These previous priorities remain important, however, and will likely be future benefits as companies increase their focus on improving device quality and hybrid work policies.

Nearly 40% of technology decision-makers said that improving PCs/laptops and device management was a top employee request for supporting a better hybrid work environment. In particular, they believed that employee expectations around PCs/laptops are focused on three primary factors:

- **Core PC performance.** There is nothing worse than a slow computer when trying to get work done. Employees need devices they can rely on, which means devices with high processing speeds, long battery life, and reliable connectivity from varying locations. That is why 40% of surveyed business leaders saw this as a top employee requirement. Battery life will play a growing role in the world of hybrid work as employees switch contexts, find themselves in collaboration spaces, and move around.
- **Compatibility with business systems/applications.** The ability to run key business applications from anywhere is essential. This access from anywhere requires two things: 1) reliable and secure connectivity to the internet and 2) compatibility with existing systems and applications to ensure a seamless work experience. If new PCs can't provide these capabilities, any expected productivity gains from having new PCs are lost.

- **Ease of integrating into various work environments.** Hybrid office work is new for most organizations. Because of this, surveyed leaders said they intend to test different configurations over time to refine their organizations' strategies. With this uncertainty, employees will want a PC that can support various options.

## COMPUTER INVESTMENT IS INCREASING

Business and technology decision-makers recognize that current devices —and the way they are managed —are not fully conducive to a hybrid working environment. Fifty-one percent reported that technology improvements are needed (see Figure 2). Recognizing this need for improvement, 76% of decision-makers responsible for employee equipment plan to increase investments in PCs over the next couple years with 36% expecting double digital investment growth. This represents an increase of more than two times in the total number of companies substantially increasing PC budgets by 10% or more compared to the past two years.

**76%**

of decision-makers responsible for employee equipment plan to increase investments in PCs over the next couple years.

**Figure 1**

**Post-Pandemic Employee-Related Priorities Focus On Hybrid Work**

Pre-Pandemic (Before March 2020)	During The Pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021)	Late And Post-Pandemic (After June 2021)
 <p>Ensuring proper data access and security across all business systems</p>	 <p>Enabling more flexible work arrangements (e.g., in-office, remote, hybrid)</p>	 <p>Making hybrid work easier through increased availability of computer peripherals</p>
 <p>Expanding the number of software applications/tools to support key business tasks</p>	 <p>Making hybrid work easier through increased availability of computer peripherals</p>	 <p>Enabling more flexible work arrangements (e.g., in-office, remote, hybrid)</p>
 <p>Improving communication and collaboration/sharing solutions</p>	 <p>Promoting employee well-being collaboration/sharing solutions</p>	 <p>Improving the quality of employees' computers to better support hybrid work</p>

Base: 1,733 business and technology decision-makers responsible for employee equipment, software, and post-pandemic back-to-work plan

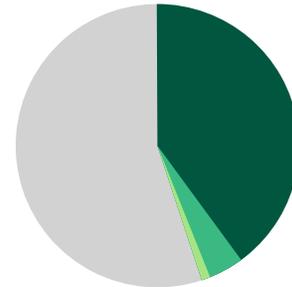
Note: Showing top 3 employee-related priorities

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, June 2021

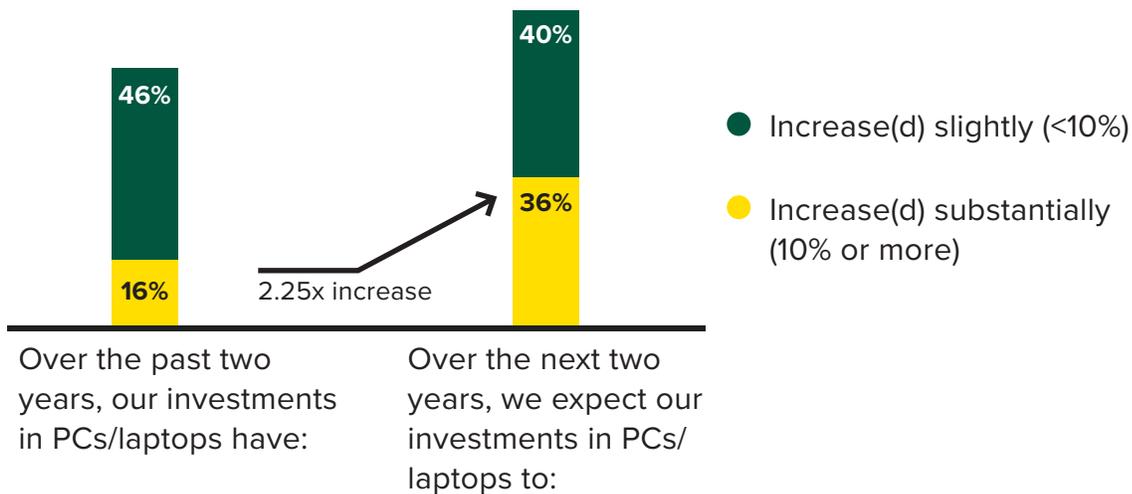
Figure 2

**Business And Technology Leaders Recognize PC Improvements Are Necessary.**  
“Do you feel your company’s current PC/laptop and device management platform(s) are conducive for supporting a hybrid work environment?”

- Yes, but it could use some improvements **45%**
- No, but we can fix that by making a few small changes **5%**
- No, we need a lot of work **1%**



“How have your investments in employee PCs changed over time?”



Base: 1,733 business and technology decision-makers responsible for employee equipment, software, and post-pandemic back-to-work plan

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, June 2021

## Some PCs Aren't Optimized To Support Hybrid Work

Understanding the primary challenges employees face with their current devices is critical for understanding where companies should invest to drive improvements. Business leaders estimated that employees face 3.5 technology challenges on average in their daily working life, including short battery life, slow processing speeds, lack of security, mobile friendliness, and more (see Figure 3).

Business and technology decision-makers today are not fully confident that their current devices are the best fit for hybrid work. For example, only 32% strongly agreed that their current devices provide employees with mobility and flexibility, while 30% reported that their current devices are best in class for hybrid work. This means employees can work well in the office, at home, and on journeys in between. Recognizing these gaps, over 70% of those surveyed believed that their organizations need significant to moderate improvements to PC quality to support hybrid work more successfully.

Making these improvements is easier said than done, however. Business leaders know the technology changes they want and need, but several barriers make that path more difficult, including:

- **Security concerns.** With any new technology implementation, security is always top of mind. Forty-one percent of respondents identified it as a top barrier. Security teams have a lot to think about with preparing new devices, which could include a shift in device types (i.e., moving from desktops to laptops or two-in-ones), to ensure proper permissions, firewalls, and physical security measures are in place for a more mobile workforce.

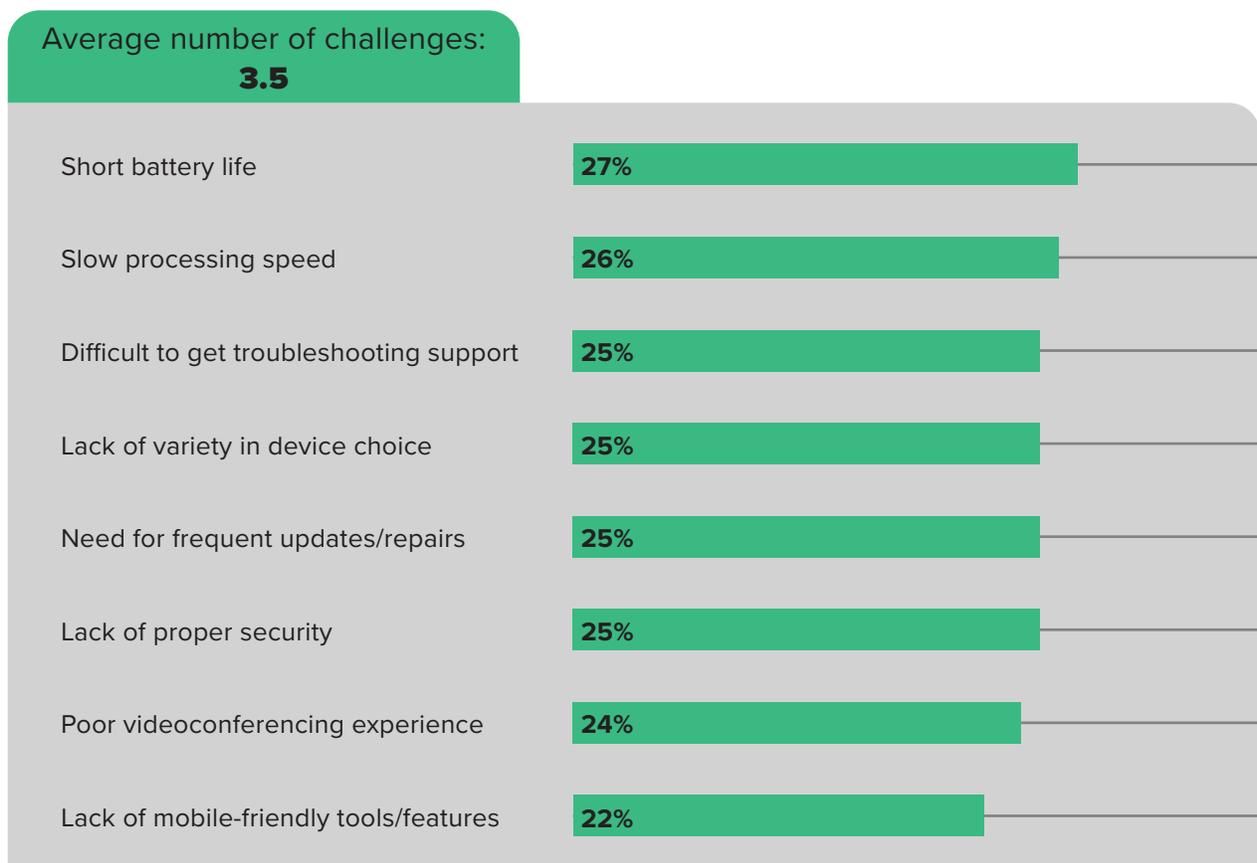


of those surveyed believe that significant to moderate improvements to PC quality are needed to support hybrid work more successfully.

- **Limited budgets.** Budget is always a challenge, but decision-makers expect budgets to increase for new devices. So, while budget is a challenge currently, that is expected to become a lesser barrier as PC investment funding increases.
- **The lack of a clear post-pandemic office plan.** It is hard to know what technology needs will be without a clear work plan. Roughly one-third of respondents reported that their companies are still finalizing their office-reopening plans, which will have a significant impact on employees' device needs. This also has an impact on IT staffing, as organizations will need to make sure they are properly staffed to support the businesses' desired device strategy.

**Figure 3**

**Main PC Challenges Employees Face**



Base: 1,733 business and technology decision-makers responsible for employee equipment, software, and post-pandemic back-to-work plan

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, June 2021

## PCs Need The Right Features, Peripherals, And Supporting Processes

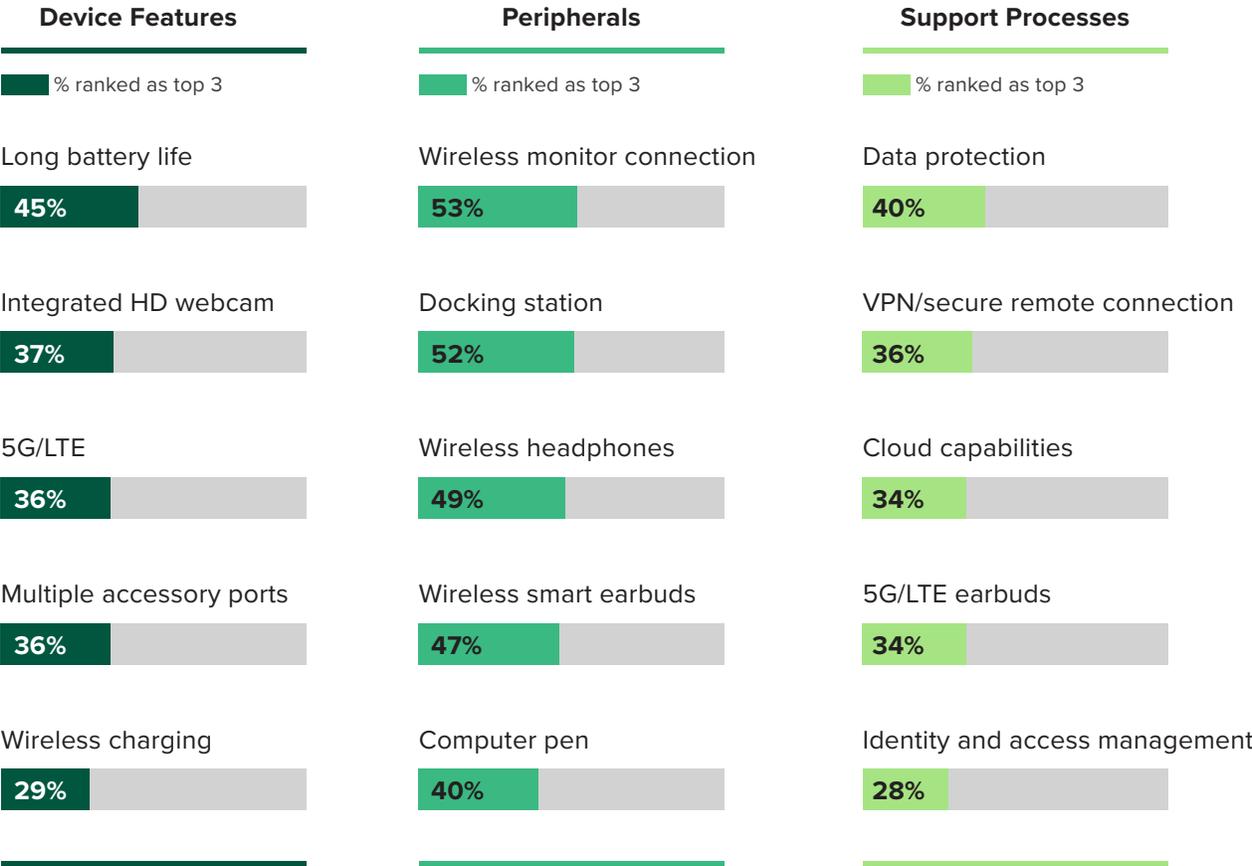
Companies are already taking steps to address the various barriers and challenges to providing better devices for employees. However, business and technology decision-makers need to ensure they invest in devices with the right features and functions to meet employees' needs and drive a successful employee experience.

Our survey revealed that decision-makers are prioritizing security, speed, compatibility with software and applications, videoconferencing capabilities, and adaptability to new setups for PCs over the next two years. These features are all essential for a hybrid workforce. The PC features, peripherals, and supporting technology capabilities that were reported as most important to employees moving into a hybrid workspace are as follows (see Figure 4):

- **PC device features.** The most important device features are those that support remote and on-the-go functions, including longer battery life, integrated HD webcam, 5G/LTE, and accessory ports. The combination of these features will benefit employees who are moving around and might not have time to plug in for charging and need internet connectivity from locations where WiFi or security is inadequate.
- **PC peripherals.** The right peripherals can significantly augment the hybrid work experience. The top-mentioned peripherals were wireless monitor connection, docking stations, and wireless headphones/earbuds. Each of these extends functionality in home offices and a company office. This makes them perfect complements to hybrid work styles since these features don't require carrying around extra items and make more permanent home or office setups easier to plug into without extensive setup.
- **Supporting technology and processes.** Having quality devices with the right features is essential, but those devices need to connect to the company's technology infrastructure, including servers, networks, cloud, and apps databases, to be useful. When asked which technologies or processes were most important beyond devices for supporting hybrid work environments, the top responses were data protection, VPN/

secure remote connect, cloud capabilities, 5G/LTE, and identity and access management. Three of the top five were security focused, which reinforces the need to focus on creating secure ways for employees to connect to the data and systems they need from anywhere. Having the right cloud-enabled software is instrumental in enabling that outcome.

**Figure 4**  
**Top Preferred PC Features, Peripherals, And Support Processes**



Base: Varied business and technology decision-makers responsible for employee equipment, software, and post-pandemic back-to-work plan  
 Note: Not all responses shown  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, June 2021

## PC Improvement Investments Drive Lasting Business Benefits

Business and technology decision-makers are starting to take action to make their vision of an efficient hybrid work environment — enabled with the right devices — a reality. Device-improvement efforts are focused on three primary tasks:

- **Increasing funding for employee PCs.** Nearly 50% of those surveyed acknowledged that investing in better PCs/laptops is an essential next step for their business. As budgets improve, 46% intend to replace old devices with newer, more portable ones that are better suited for a hybrid work environment.
- **Improving PC security for remote connectivity.** Business leaders want to ensure that employees can connect securely from anywhere. Fifty-one percent considered improving device security through tools such as VPNs as a critical next step for preparing for post-pandemic work.
- **Expanding the use of cloud software.** Cloud is a perfect vehicle for helping employees get set up on new PCs when not actively in an office. That is why 47% of respondents wanted to expand their organizations' use of cloud software to simplify the onboarding and installation process for new PCs.

### IMPROVED PC BENEFITS EXTEND TO EMPLOYEES AND THE COMPANY

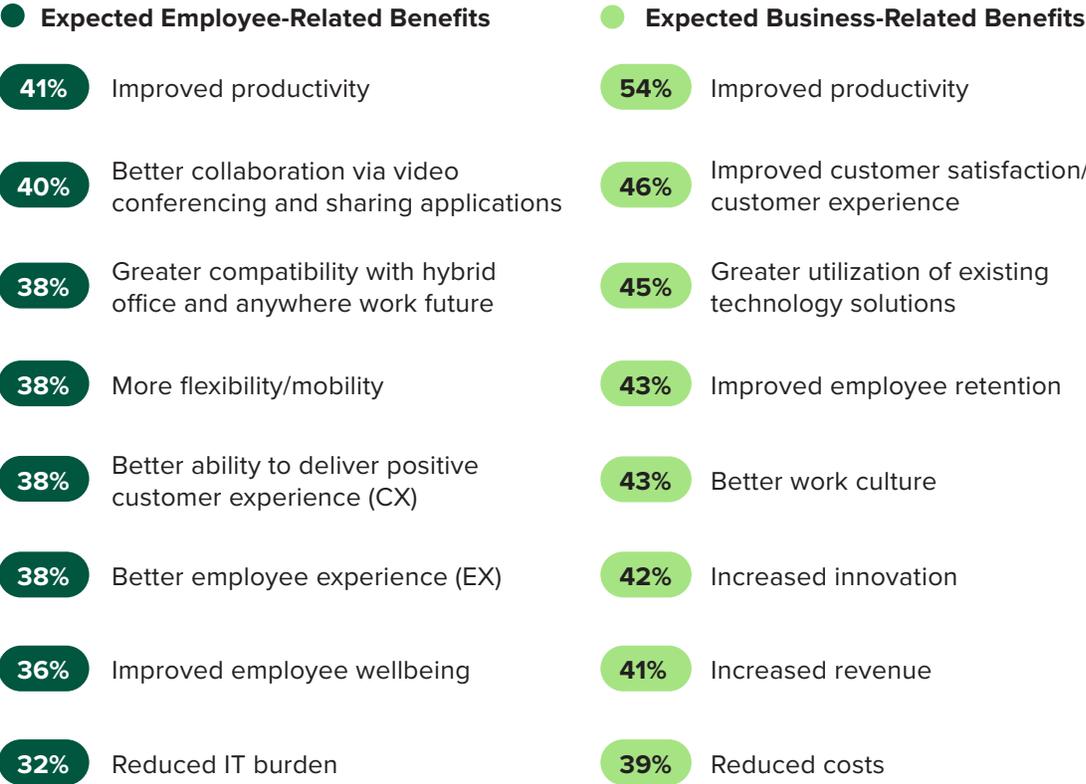
Employees expect improved PCs to drive several positive outcomes, including improved productivity (41%); enhanced collaboration with better videoconferencing and sharing applications (40%); a more flexible work experience for hybrid-office workers (38%); and the improved ability to deliver positive customer experiences (38%). The right PCs equipped with the right features to support hybrid work enable employees to spend more time working and serving customers and less time setting up and getting connected as their work location changes.

From a broader business perspective, it is easy to see how the benefits employees experience directly tie to business outcomes (see Figure 5). Employee productivity leads to overall business productivity, which could

equate to higher revenue, reduced costs, and increased innovation. In turn, this could also drive better employee retention and company culture. Employees that are equipped to better serve customers will improve their company’s overall customer experience. Technology decision-makers expect to see greater utilization of the tools and technology solutions they have in place as they invest in better PCs. Employees are more inclined to use the tools they are given when those tools have been purposefully selected to complement their new working situations.

**Key Recommendations —>**

**Figure 5**  
**PC Improvements Drive Employee And Business Benefits**



Base: 1,733 business and technology decision-makers responsible for employee equipment, software, and post-pandemic back-to-work plan  
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, June 2021

## Key Recommendations

As the pandemic recedes, 70% of organizations will likely embrace more flexible and remote work styles.<sup>1</sup> A hybrid workplace will emerge, allowing employees to spend time in the office a few days a week and have the choice to work wherever they choose the rest of the week. As a result, the employee journey will evolve, necessitating PCs and applications that are flexible, secure, and excellent at switching contexts from home offices to corporate offices to hotel rooms.

Forrester's in-depth survey regarding the hybrid work PC needs and challenges that business and technology decision-makers face yielded several important recommendations:

### **Place employee experience (EX) at the center of your strategy.**

Employee experience, a measure of how engaged workers are from their interactions in their employer's environment, can rise or fall based on the quality of available technology. Understand that employees' needs change along with the nature of work, and place those needs at the center of your back-to-office and PC strategies. High EX is the key driver of employee productivity, so investments here yield the highest possible return on investment.

### **Map employees' new journeys in the hybrid world.**

To understand employees' needs, look at their new daily journeys and the moments that matter every day. Employees aren't simply moving from the living room to the den to take a videoconference call; they'll be checking in and out of a flex desk at the office and — when it's safe — working on planes, in cafes, and at customer sites. Interview and survey employees in different roles to create role-specific journey maps.

### **Choose PCs that map to employee journeys and drive employee experience.**

Document the moments that matter to build a map of employee needs and decide what's important in their PCs. For example, built-in, high-quality webcams will become table stakes for many. A hybrid worker moving from flex desk to conference room might require longer battery life; an employee who resumes travel would almost certainly benefit from 5G/LTE. Consider this journey-mapping exercise by role. A salesperson and a software engineer might have divergent needs that can be accomplished via the same PC or by equipping them with role-specific devices.

### **Articulate a business case for a modern technology stack.**

Great PC experiences start with PC hardware, but they don't end there. IT must have cloud-enabled, modern management tools to help equip employees with great employee experiences. That stack continues beyond IT management to productivity applications and web applications that can make employees' productivity soar wherever they are.

### **Reconsider your approach to a device refresh.**

Corporate policies around PC refresh vary with some organizations refreshing every two years and others waiting as long as seven. For many knowledge workers, up-to-date technology is required to provide the features and innovations they need, the speed to accomplish work tasks, and the stability to require little support while doing so. Faster refresh cycles can also benefit your company's business continuity and resilience strategies while simultaneously improving your endpoint security posture.

## Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey with 1,733 business decision-makers in IT, HR, and line-of-business roles across 11 countries to explore the top of hybrid work and PCs. The countries included were the US, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Japan, and Australia. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank-you for time spent on the survey. The study began in May 2021 and was completed in June 2021.

## Appendix B: Demographics

REGION	
North America	18%
EMEA	63%
APAC	18%

INDUSTRY	
Retail	13%
Technology	11%
Manufacturing	10%
Financial services	10%
Healthcare	7%
Other	47%

COMPANY SIZE	
500 to 999 employees	20%
1,000 to 4,999 employees	45%
5,000 to 19,000 employees	22%
20,000 or more employees	13%

ROLES	
Line-of-business	33%
IT	33%
HR/EX	33%

TITLE	
C-level executive	34%
VP	22%
Director	44%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

## Appendix C: Supplemental Material

<sup>1</sup> Source: “Don’t Miss Your Anywhere-Work Opportunity,” Forrester Research, Inc., March 29, 2021.



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