



Nintex Workplace 2021 Study

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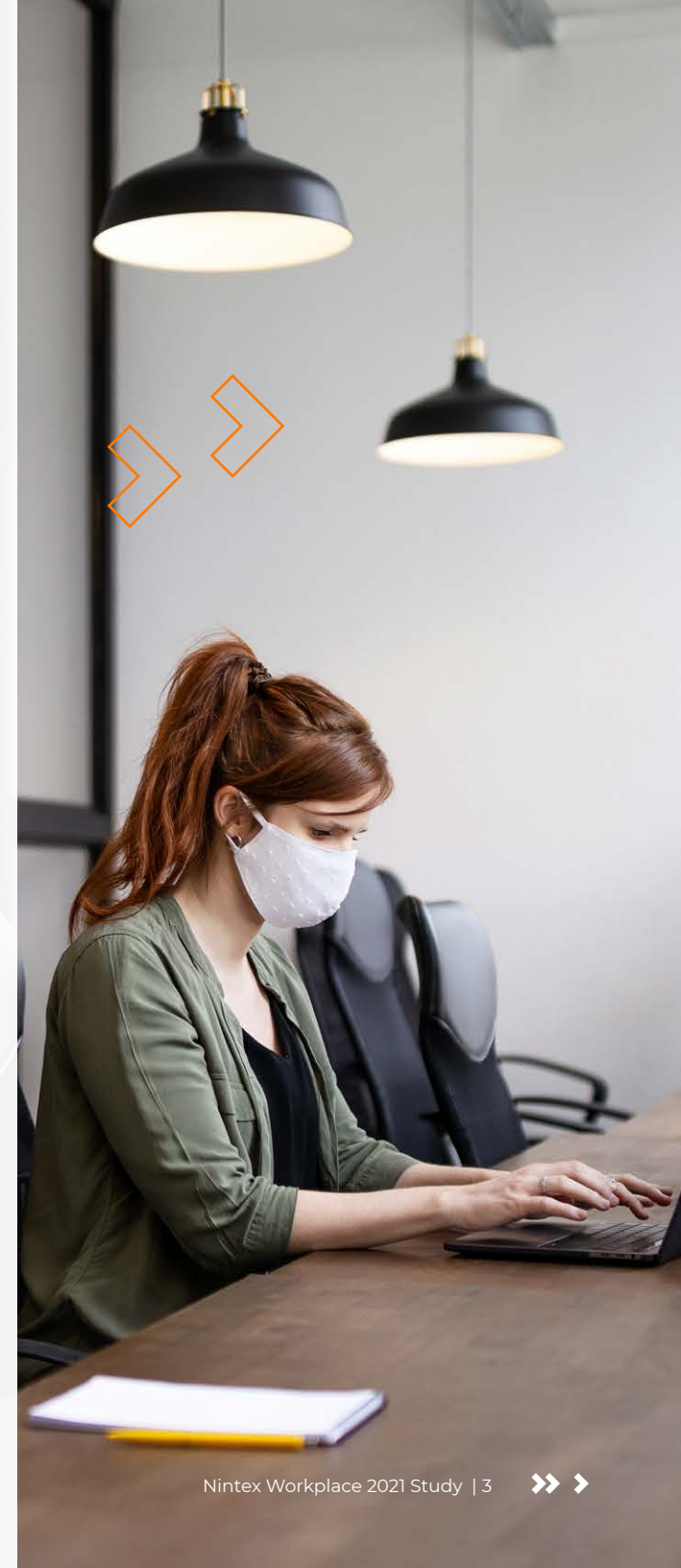
2020 was not the year anyone expected

As many companies continue to function remotely and are doing more with less, organizations aren't only shifting their business goals — they're re-evaluating the way we work. From recruiting to employee onboarding to customer interactions, enterprises are rewriting the playbook in real time. While process automation was already in development for countless organizations looking to streamline the workplace, the past year has forced the point. In many cases, years-long digital transformation plans have become a two- or three-month sprint.

As the COVID-19 pandemic stretches on, organizations continue to grapple with the business implications of remote work, higher stakes and reduced staff. But while business leaders around the country are planning eventual return-to-office guidelines, the reality is that we won't go back to the way things were. There will be a “new normal” that we must navigate together — Workplace 2021.

To better understand how the workplace will evolve in 2021, we surveyed 1,000 U.S.-based full-time enterprise employees working remotely to gauge employee sentiment toward the evolving workplace. By surveying U.S. employees about their working experience during the pandemic — from the challenges they faced to the technology that helped them to their feelings about returning to the office — we're able to predict how workplaces in America will look in 2021.

Our findings revealed that workflow improvement and process automation will play a crucial role in creating a future work environment that's more remote, flexible and fulfilling.



Key findings

1

Most employees are doing well in remote work environments, but individual experiences and external factors introduce challenges.

2

Remote workflow gaps and process inefficiencies are preventing employees from achieving full productivity.

3

The way we work is changing, with employees calling for solutions like workflow automation to maximize their efficiency and enable permanent flexibility.



Where we are

The pulse on remote work

Employees haven't just adapted to fully remote work — the majority are doing well in this new environment.

Seventy percent of respondents said their experiences working remotely during COVID-19 have been better and more productive than they expected. When asked to describe their better-than-expected experiences, respondents pointed to family time, no commute, fewer interruptions and work-life balance.



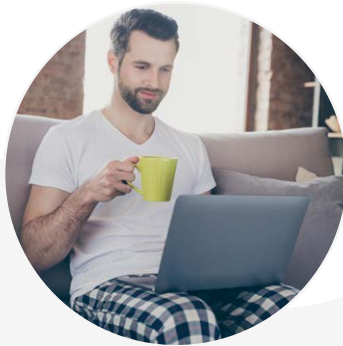
Why working remotely has gone better than expected



Family time

"I'm able to take breaks to help my pregnant wife around the house. I'm able to cook and eat dinner with her every night because of work from home. I can do 100% of my job just as well from home and I would like to continue working from home forever."

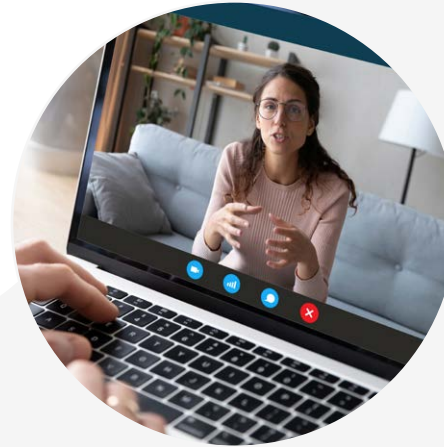
"I have more time to spend with my family at home and relate with them the way a father and a husband should."



No commute

"There is no commute, which means I can start my day sooner. There is no time taken to prepare 'to go' breakfast and lunch. I can take a break and truly rest, even if that means a 10-15 minute nap."

"I am able to focus more on myself, as I am able to do the things that I previously couldn't do at work. Commuting has been eliminated so there is not additional time wasted on that. I am happier when I work remotely and my life is infinitely more flexible this way."



Fewer interruptions

"I have been able to automate so many of my work processes and I'm experiencing fewer interruptions."

"I am much more productive and able to dedicate myself to my actual work without the social distractions or obligations of being in an office."

"I am able to focus on my work without being interrupted constantly by those around me."



Work-life balance

"I can see my family, dress how I want, don't have to drive, start my evening sooner, and can relax more."

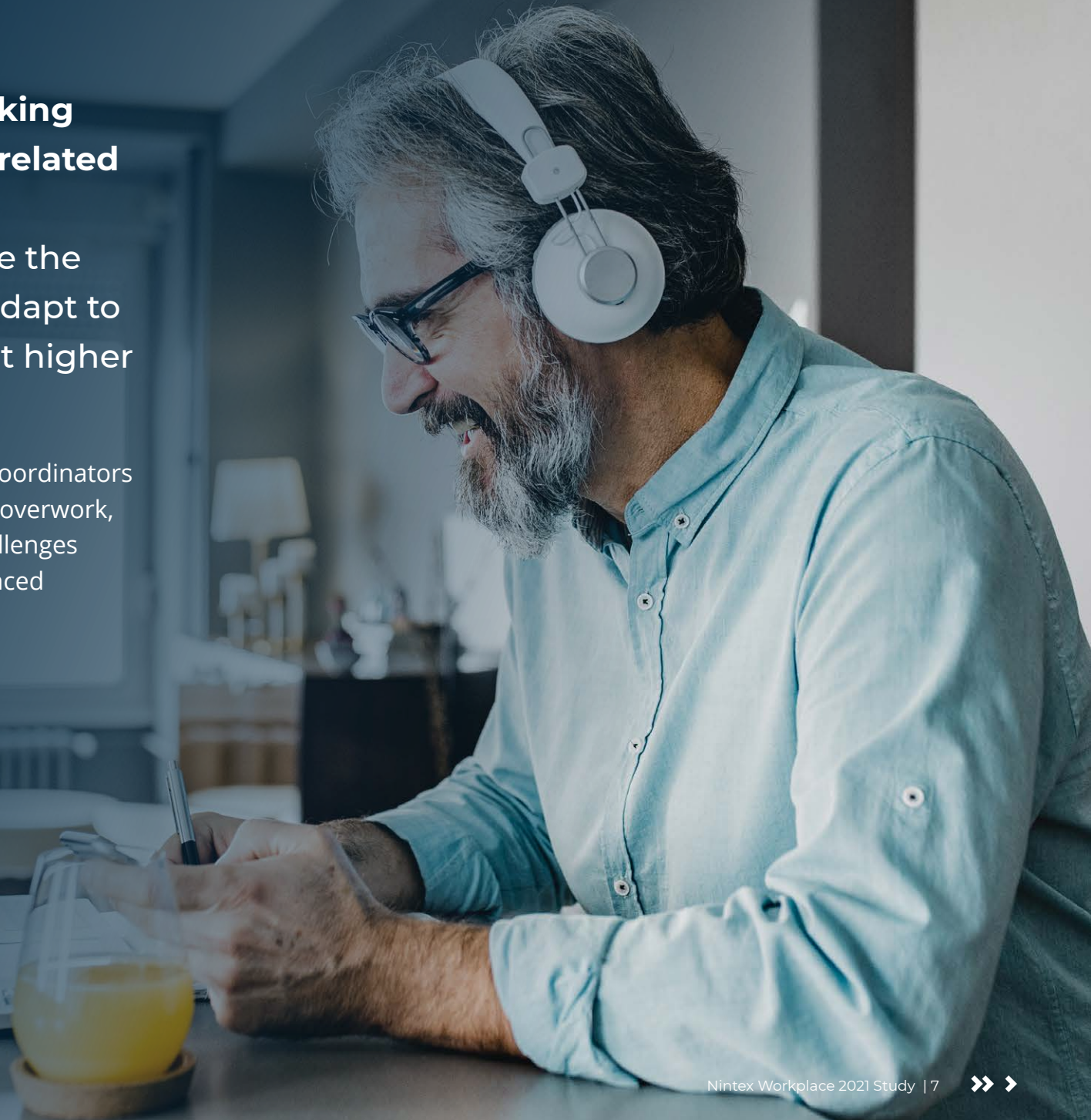
"I like being able to not have to get ready for work. I also like how during my lunches and breaks I can do productive things like laundry or wash dishes or make an actual meal to eat instead of just being on my phone during my lunches and break."

"I am able to be home and off work earlier than I used to, I have more time with my child and family and am able to shower or workout during lunch and get more accomplished."

The experience of working remotely is closely correlated with job level.

The more senior you are the more likely you are to adapt to remote work and report higher productivity.

Entry-level roles — identified as Coordinators or Specialists — are experiencing overwork, confusion and living situation challenges more so than their more experienced colleagues.





RESPONDENTS WHO SAID WORKING REMOTELY HAS BEEN BETTER/MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN THEY EXPECTED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC



CHALLENGES MAKING REMOTE WORK HARDER THAN EXPECTED FOR MORE ENTRY-LEVEL (COORDINATOR OR SPECIALIST) ROLES

Overwork

It feels like I'm **working all of the time.**

It's tough to maintain a work-life balance and to **keep myself from working more than I need to.**

I've found it **difficult to have enough quiet space** to focus on my work."

Living situation

My living situation is not good."

Unclear job instructions

I'm working **longer hours with less communication.**

These challenges are heightened for entry-level employees who are missing out on the in-person experience of working their first full-time jobs. While more senior-level employees already have a grasp on workplace processes and expectations, junior-level employees don't share the same advantage.

We asked respondents to rate how much they *expected* the transition to fully remote work would positively impact key areas at the onset of the pandemic, then compared those responses with what respondents actually experienced after six months of remote work. **Across the board, employees reported a more positive experience than what they expected — including the ability to do their overall jobs.**

IMPACT AREAS

EXPECTED POSITIVE VS. REALIZED POSITIVE

63% | 64% Technology/tools used by company



62% | 68% Ability to do my job



60% | 65% Work/life balance



58% | 63% IT operations



59% | 62% Personal well-being/mental health

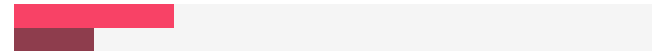


Additionally, negative expectations fell during the pandemic across all of respondents' top five expected negative impact areas.

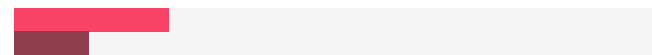
IMPACT AREAS

EXPECTED NEGATIVE VS. REALIZED NEGATIVE

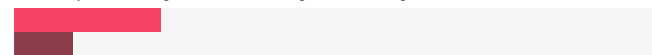
25% | 16% Cross-team collaboration



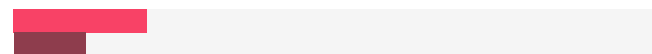
24% | 15% My working relationships with my colleagues



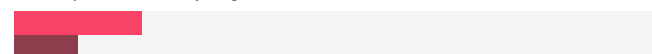
23% | 11% My team's ability to do its job



20% | 15% Work-life balance

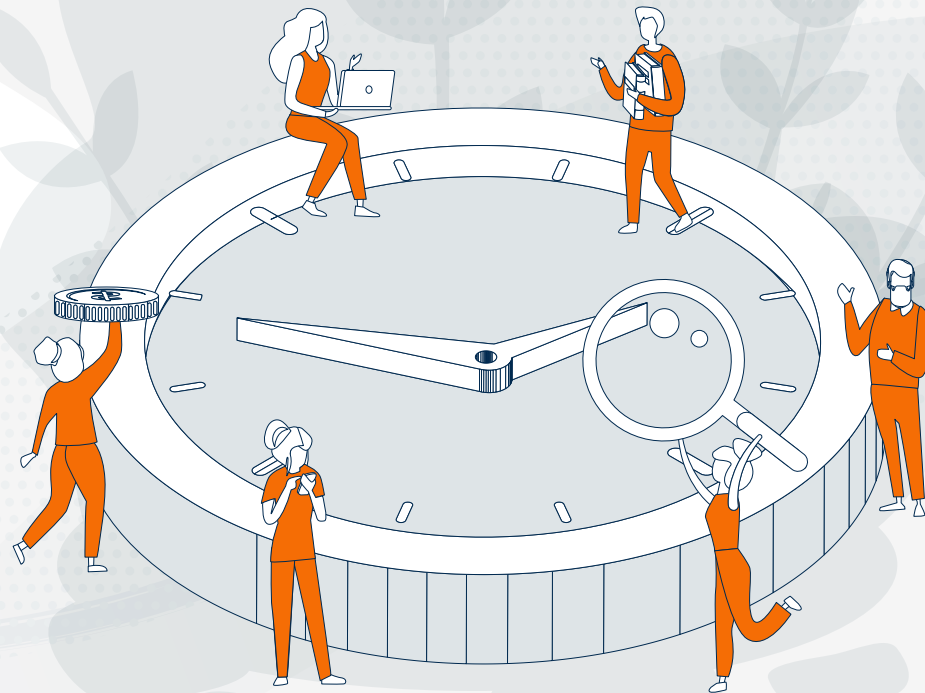


19% | 14% Company culture



Employees are also getting
their work done more
efficiently from home.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they're getting their work done in fewer hours per week since transitioning to full-time remote. Of those respondents, **41%** — the largest group — said they're **getting their work done in far fewer hours now per week.**



Not all WFH experiences are created equal.

The majority of employees with dependents are working harder and look forward to time back in the office.

Many employees with dependents — both child(ren) and adult(s) — are clocking more than nine working hours each day, while only one-third of those without dependents are working the same amount.



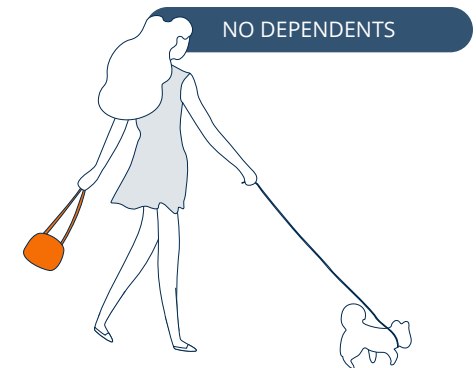
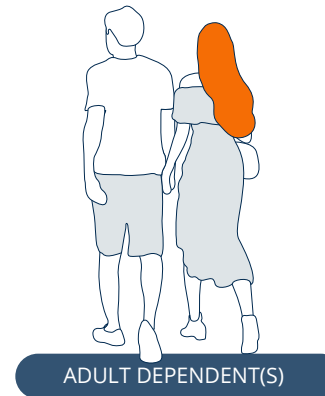
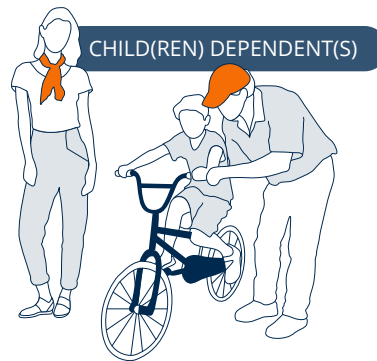
**RESPONDENTS AVERAGING
MORE THAN NINE HOURS ON
THE COMPUTER/DAY FOR WORK**

50%

45%

33%

Workers with dependents are also twice as enthusiastic about their company's plans to return to the office.



**RESPONDENTS WHO ARE VERY
EXCITED TO RETURN TO THE
OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

62%

60%

29%

The multitasking required to manage a full-time workload, childcare and e-learning responsibilities likely translates to logging longer hours since toggling between tasks is associated with diminished productivity. It's not surprising, therefore, that workers with dependents are eager to return to the office where boundaries are less blurred.

The convergence of the pandemic and current events is impacting employee mental health.

49%



Nearly half of employees (49%) are more sad and lonely than usual working remotely during the pandemic, which is largely attributable to virus-related concerns and restrictions, including travel — not remote work. Additionally, more than half (56%) of employees said current, non-work related events have impacted their productivity at work.

RESPONDENTS' PERSONAL WELLNESS WORKING REMOTELY DURING THE PANDEMIC



22% ☹️

Much more sad/
lonely than usual

27% ☹️

Somewhat more sad/
lonely than usual

= 49%

TOP 5 REASONS FOR FEELING MORE SAD/LONELY WORKING FROM HOME DURING THE PANDEMIC

52% Fear of the virus

51% Not being able to see friends/family in-person

41% Not being able to travel to business events

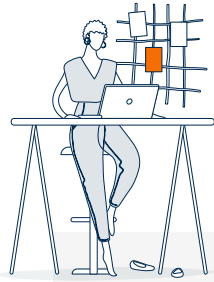
38% Not being able to socialize in public places as much
(restaurants, coffee shops, movie theaters)

38% Not being able to see co-workers in the office
(meetings, lunches, water cooler talk)



Employees temporarily living with friends or family are struggling more financially and emotionally compared to those in other living situations.

Those who are temporarily living with friends or family report the highest salary reductions, indicating their moves may have been a last resort due to economic circumstances.



Respondents who experienced salary reductions in 2020

Respondents who are more sad/lonely than usual working remotely during the pandemic

Respondents who said current, non-work related political, public health and/or global events have impacted their productivity at work

LIVE ALONE

40%

56%

47%



LIVE WITH FAMILY

44%

48%

58%



LIVE WITH ROOMMATES

35%

50%

35%



TEMPORARILY LIVE WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY

50%

66%

83%

These “COVID nomads” also reported feeling higher levels of sadness and loneliness working remotely during the pandemic compared to those in all other living situations — even those who live alone.

Additionally, those who temporarily live with friends or family reported feeling a greater impact on their productivity due to current events.

It’s easy to assume that employees temporarily living with friends or family are less lonely, but many are experiencing the opposite. While employers may not be able to restore full salaries, they can provide mental health resources and tools to help employee wellbeing and to improve productivity.

Why it matters

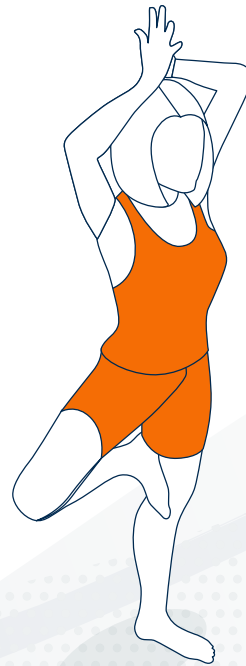
Overall, employees reported extremely positive remote work experiences. But employers should acknowledge that individual experiences vary — and some employees may need more support or flexibility.

External stressors including family obligations, living situations and current events have a direct impact on employee morale and productivity. While dependent care demands are taking up more of some employees' available time, others are experiencing feelings of isolation or anxiety over current events. Of course, work-related stressors, like the pressure of managing higher workloads, also affect the employee experience.

While employees are dealing with various types of issues, the effect on their work is similar. They may be more likely to burn out or slip up, especially when it comes to completing repetitive tasks like data management. Software solutions that simplify complex processes can help ease employee stress and fatigue in the current moment — and beyond.

What we need Identifying remote workflow gaps

Even though 67% of employees reported they're getting their work done more efficiently since transitioning to full-time remote, they feel they could be even more productive with additional flexibility, better tech equipment and easy-to-use automation software.



TOP 5 THINGS RESPONDENTS SAID WOULD MAKE THEM MORE PRODUCTIVE

50% A more flexible work schedule

44% Better hardware equipment for my home office
(laptop, monitor(s), keyboard, headset)

37% Software to help me easily automate work

37% Working fewer hours every week

34% A 4-day workweek

When asked what their company could be doing to make fully remote work run smoother, many respondents doubled down on these sentiments.

What respondents' companies could be doing to make fully remote work run smoother



Hardware



"Give me better equipment and technology to enable me to do my job more effectively."

"Provide equipment or allowances to optimize work from home space."

"I think it would be nice if they could somehow pay for higher speed internet for the employees that have to work from home."

"Compensation for wifi and more work materials that would have been provided in office."



Workflow improvements



"Provide better technological support for automation to reduce workload."

"More equipment that could help improve workflow."

"The use of automated software and the flexibility in remote work."

"Making working at home efficient by introducing the best technologies and services which would aid working."



Support and communication



"Offer mental support services."

"Require my manager to check in and support."

"Better communication from management."

"Better communication between teams. Less 'all-hands' type communication."

"Stop using remote work as an excuse to check up on productivity and be more invasive in general."



Flexibility



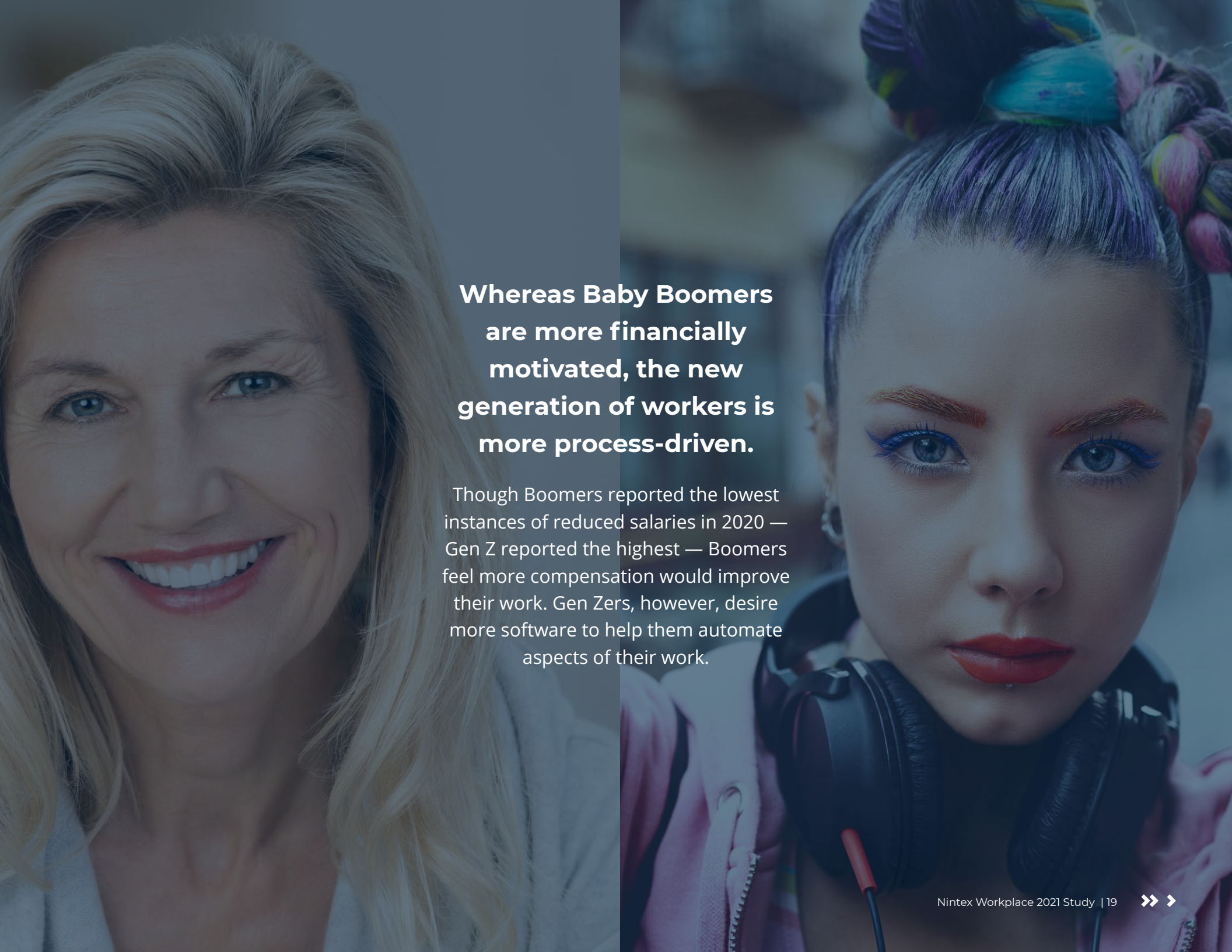
"Letting us make up our work schedule."

"More pay or working a day less."

"Seek to reduce working hours, both at the beginning and end of the daily work shift and also establish greater communication remotely between workers."

"Have 'do not disturb' time blocks."

"Our company could give us a more flexible work hour routine."



**Whereas Baby Boomers
are more financially
motivated, the new
generation of workers is
more process-driven.**

Though Boomers reported the lowest instances of reduced salaries in 2020 — Gen Z reported the highest — Boomers feel more compensation would improve their work. Gen Zers, however, desire more software to help them automate aspects of their work.

TOP THING THAT WOULD MAKE RESPONDENTS MORE PRODUCTIVE AT WORK

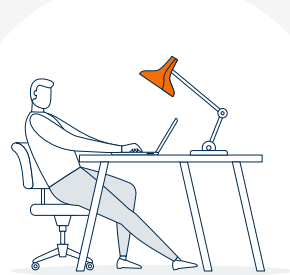
55%

Software to help me easily automate work



50%

Better hardware equipment for my home office (laptop, monitor(s), keyboard, headset)



56%

A more flexible work schedule



42%

An increase in pay



TOP THING THAT WOULD IMPROVE RESPONDENTS' WORK LIFE IN 2021

60%

Company provides me with a work-from-home allowance to invest in faster WiFi and/or more home office equipment (standing desk, monitor, video camera, etc)

63%

56%

54%

A raise

*Boomers will put up with business as usual while working remotely in exchange for higher salaries. But Gen Z sees the opportunity to reimagine the way we work for the better. As Boomers approach retirement age, **workplaces need to evolve to meet the needs and match the behaviors of younger generations.***

Workers are nearly split on the return-to-office question, signaling a desire for permanent flexibility.

56%



Despite their positive experiences working from home, 56% of employees whose companies have announced plans to return to the office are very excited by the prospect. Yet just over half (51%) of all respondents said their work life would improve with the ability to permanently work remotely.

These results are perhaps a microcosmic reflection of our current reality. Social distancing due to the COVID-19 crisis has many people seeking human connection and feeling nostalgic for past routines — as inefficient and time-consuming as they may have been. And the fact that all of these variables remain unknown for the near term is likely pulling employees' states of mind in opposite directions.

*Ultimately, one thing is clear: Employees want **permanent flexibility**. They're excited to return to the office, but they want to maintain many of the benefits they've enjoyed while working from home.*

TOP 5 THINGS THAT WOULD IMPROVE EMPLOYEES' WORK LIFE IN 2021



Job level is correlated with a significant return-to-office excitement gap.

Entry-level employees are notably less enthused than their higher-ranking colleagues about their company's plans to return to the office.

RESPONDENTS WHO ARE VERY EXCITED TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

26%

**COORDINATORS/
SPECIALISTS**

63%

**MANAGERS/
DIRECTORS**

62%

VP/C-SUITE



Why it matters

Employee benefit packages in 2021 should evolve beyond the standard health insurance and 401K offerings of traditional workplaces. Employees are likely to prioritize companies that offer flexible work options aimed at improving the individual employee experience, in turn maximizing their productivity and engagement on the job.

Employers should note that process platforms with easy-to-use automation software can help eliminate manual, paper-based and repetitive tasks that inhibit employees from focusing on more productive, high-value work.

In fact,

39%

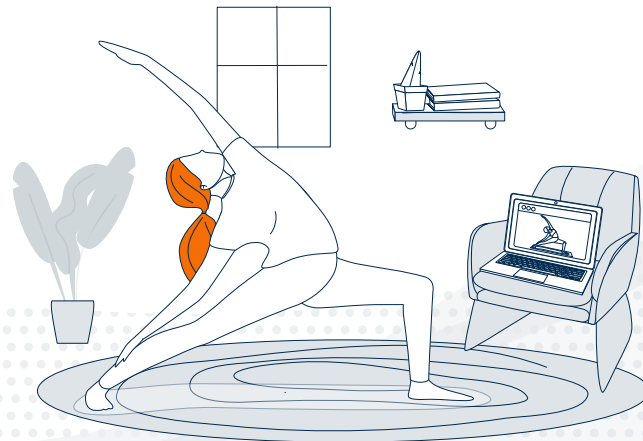
of employees said access to software solutions that help their team easily automate manual and repetitive work would improve their work life in 2021. Platforms with process mapping tools can also improve the way organizations are run overall by accelerating the creation of automated processes and modern digital experiences.

How we get there

Powering Workplace 2021

More support, less process inefficiencies

Our survey revealed that while the majority of remote employees in the U.S. enjoy working from home, there's definitely room for enterprises to improve the experience.



Based on our findings, Workplace 2021 requires:

1. Better hardware and software

More than half (58%) of remote employees said investments in better hardware equipment for their home office — like a laptop, monitor, keyboard or headset — would improve their work life in 2021. The same number (44%) of respondents also said better home hardware would make them more productive at work. Enterprises should establish hardware stipends to help employees optimize their work-from-home set ups.

And despite 32% of workers saying their organization had workflow automation solutions in place before the pandemic, 39% also said access to software solutions that help their team easily automate manual and repetitive work would improve their work life in 2021. These results indicate enterprises aren't using existing solutions to their full potential — or that existing solutions simply aren't enough, and employees want access to even more workflow automation.

The vast majority of VP and C-suite respondents feel their organizations are using AI and automation-driven tools to a very significant extent. But that sentiment lessens throughout the ranks of the organization.

RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THEIR ORGANIZATIONS USE AUTOMATION/AI-DRIVEN TOOLS ACROSS BUSINESS PROCESSES AND WORKFLOWS TO A VERY SIGNIFICANT EXTENT

75%
VP/C-Suite

62%

Managers/Directors

28%

Coordinators/Specialists

This finding presents a real opportunity for executive teams and senior leaders to better promote how their workplaces leverage software like process mapping, workflow automation, RPA and more to improve the way people work. After all, on-the-ground employees stand to benefit from these solutions the most.



Based on our findings, Workplace 2021 requires:

2. More flexibility

While most employees want to return to the office in some capacity, they also want to maintain the flexibility they've enjoyed while working remotely. Half (50%) of respondents said a more flexible work schedule would make them more productive at work.

Employers who understand that Workplace 2021 must function differently than pre-pandemic offices will be better positioned to attract and retain talent, like the [ever-growing list](#) of companies that already offer permanent flexibility.

Organizations that can support remote workforces should start downsizing existing office space in anticipation of more remote work options — and to reduce overhead costs. Instead, redesign office spaces to maximize in-person activities that require collaboration while offering employees more flexibility for other tasks.



Employees love the flexibility and free time working remotely provides

TOP 5 THINGS EMPLOYEES ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME

56%

More time to spend with friends and/or family

48%

More time to spend on personal hobbies (cooking, exercising, reading)

47%

No commute

46%

No dress code (no need to put on nice clothes or makeup)

31%

More freedom to set my own schedule

Not only are employees more productive working from home, they're happier. And happier employees are more productive and engaged — and less likely to seek new employment.

Based on our findings, Workplace 2021 requires:

3. Mental health resources

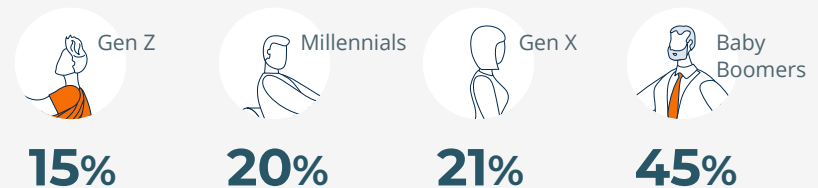
COVID-19 has increased employee stress levels, and employee burnout will negatively impact companies. Nearly half (49%) of employees are more sad and lonely than usual working remotely during the pandemic. And more than half (56%) said current, non-work related events have impacted their productivity at work.

Even though most U.S. workers have the vacation days to spare, they're not taking time off. In addition to encouraging PTO use and providing employees with access to mental health resources and healthcare options, companies should consider establishing well-being days — and treat these days like holidays. That means everyone gets the day off, and clients or customers are made aware that the organization is closed on those days. Advise, but don't require, employees to use this time for reflection, physical activity, family time, hobbies, volunteering, religious worship or other non-work related activities.

Additionally, organizations can take a cue from Microsoft and build [virtual commutes](#) into the workday. These blocks of focus time can help employees mentally prepare for and end their days, promoting boundaries between work and life, which have blurred for many with the home and the office becoming one.

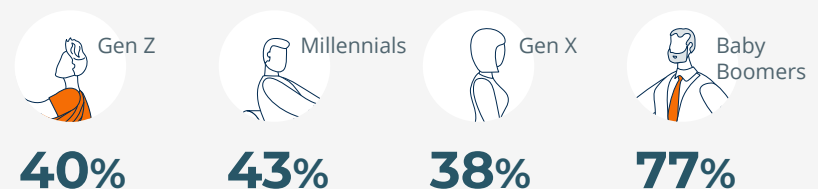
While Baby Boomers feel more apathetic toward internal and external factors during the pandemic, younger generations may need more emotional support in the workplace. Nearly half of Baby Boomers say working remotely has had no impact on their wellness.

RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED “NO CHANGE” TO THEIR PERSONAL WELLNESS WORKING REMOTELY DURING THE PANDEMIC



Baby Boomers are also twice as likely to say current events have had no impact on their productivity compared to other generations.

RESPONDENTS WHO SAID NON-WORK RELATED POLITICAL, PUBLIC HEALTH AND/OR GLOBAL EVENTS HAVE NOT IMPACTED THEIR PRODUCTIVITY



As younger generations continue to make up a larger part of the workforce, they'll come to expect mental health resources and support from every employer. These offerings will likely transition from nice-to-haves to must-haves.

Based on our findings, Workplace 2021 requires:

4. More time

Perhaps the single most valuable resource employees want more of is time. One of the biggest reasons they enjoy remote work is because, without a commute, employees have more time to spend with family and friends, and on hobbies and personal health. Yet many have found themselves in consecutive video meetings, which are compounded by inefficient processes that take up too much of their valuable time.

To prevent [video conferencing fatigue](#), encourage employees to block certain periods on their calendars for meeting-free time to complete heads-down work, exercise, take care of family, cook a meal or meditate. Enterprises can leverage automation tools to give employees back this time, which also enables them to focus on more meaningful tasks. For example, consider automated solutions to manage time-off requests, handle basic customer complaints or streamline data management. Look to [Amazon's automation strategy](#) for guidance on how to use automation to re-assign staff to more high-level tasks, spreading the same amount of work among more people — not eliminating their jobs.

Employees are burnt out, but they're not taking the time off they need to regain their energy.

According to Microsoft's Work Trend Index, 31% of U.S. respondents reported [increased burnout](#) at work during the pandemic. And our survey revealed that more than one-quarter (28%) of respondents have taken less time off in 2020 compared to 2019.

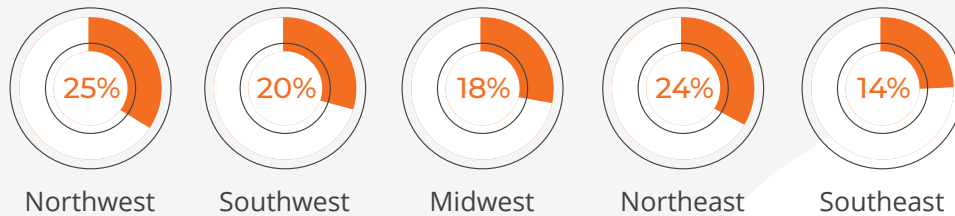
Employers must encourage PTO use, and managers should lead by example. When leadership and managers don't take time off, they signal it's not okay for junior level employees and direct reports to do so.



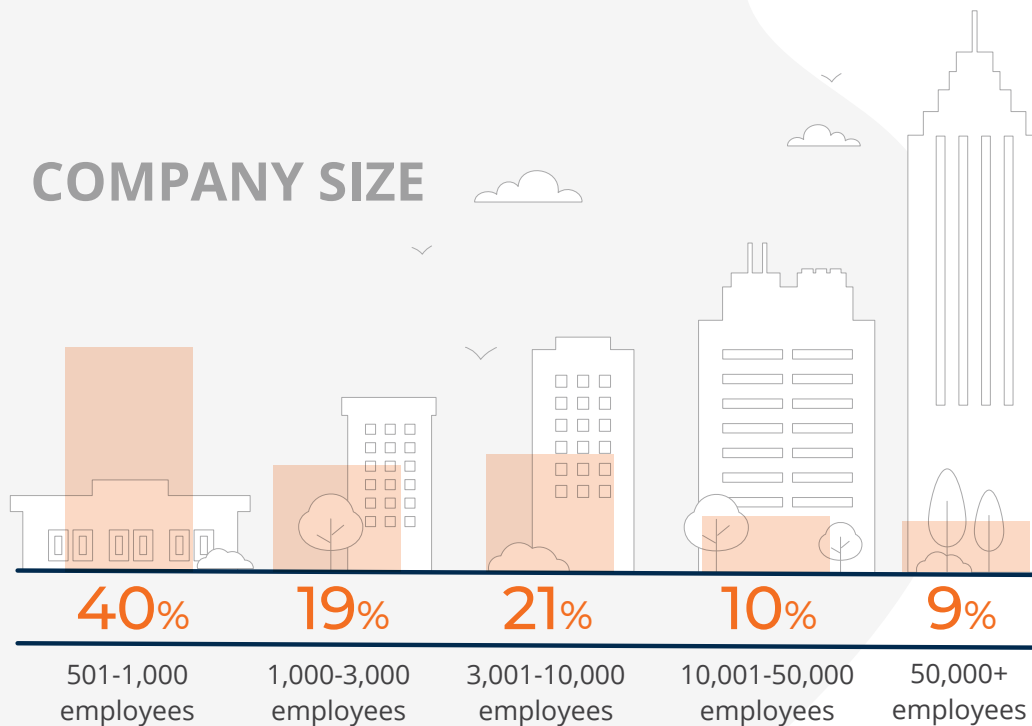
Methodology

We surveyed 1,000 U.S.-based full-time enterprise employees working remotely to gauge employee sentiment toward the evolving workplace.

REGION



COMPANY SIZE



ROLE

9% Coordinator

20% Specialist

44% Manager/Senior Specialist

13% Director

4% Vice-President

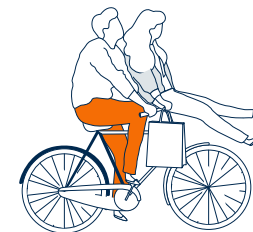
10% C-Suite

DEPENDENTS



65%

Child(ren):



36%

Adult family member



27%

None

Graphs included throughout this report may not add up to 100% since exact percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

ABOUT NINTEX

Nintex is the global standard for process management and automation. Today more than 10,000 public and private sector organizations across 90 countries turn to the Nintex Platform to accelerate progress on their digital transformation journeys by quickly and easily managing, automating and optimizing business processes. Learn more by visiting www.nintex.com and experience how Nintex and its global partner network are shaping the future of Intelligent Process Automation (IPA).

