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The Modern Workplace Demands A New Approach To Knowledge Management

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FORRESTER OPPORTUNITY SNAPSHOT: A CUSTOM STUDY COMMISSIONED BY STARMIND | MARCH 2022

Knowledge Needs Have Evolved Along With The Modern Workplace

In today's workplace, knowledge is key to creating a competitive advantage. While it was once easy for organizations to bring workers across the globe together to exchange knowledge and ideas and collaborate, the shift to hybrid working models has complicated this. Today, many employees work in isolation from the rest of their coworkers, making it more difficult for them to meet and build connections with their colleagues. It also makes it harder for them to reach out to others when they need help. More than ever, it's crucial for organizations to act now to ensure that remote working does not result in knowledge silos within their organizations.

Key Findings



Systems for documenting knowledge often fall short of employee expectations so staff often go straight to coworkers for the information they need.



Many employees find open collaboration a challenge. They often don't know who they can contact to solve a problem, and even if they do, many are reluctant to reach outside of their immediate network.



Inaccessible knowledge leads to lost time and resources, with 63% of respondents complaining of wasted time. This also impacts the business in its employee satisfaction, continuity, and innovation.

Current Approaches To Knowledge Sharing Barely Scrape The Surface

In the modern business world, an organization's biggest asset is the experience and expertise of its people. Employees depend on information and knowledge from others, and the free flow of ideas and knowledge is what sparks innovation. But existing approaches to knowledge sharing are too rigid, and only scrape the surface of the collective knowledge an organization holds.

While most organizations have systems in place to store knowledge, these tools often fall short: 36% of knowledge workers find it hard to exchange information across different teams, while 47% say information is scattered across too many sources. Twenty-five percent of respondents say there is too much raw data to sift through. Even if they do find the information they need, 26% of respondents said it is often outdated.

“What challenges, if any, do you face in terms of accessing experts or getting answers to your questions within your organization?”

Information is scattered across too many sources **47%**

Different teams use different tools/platforms, making it hard to exchange information across the organization **36%**

Information is often outdated and irrelevant **26%**

There is often too much raw data for me to sift through **25%**

Documented information is scattered across too many different sources and platforms, and it is often outdated, irrelevant, and lacking context.

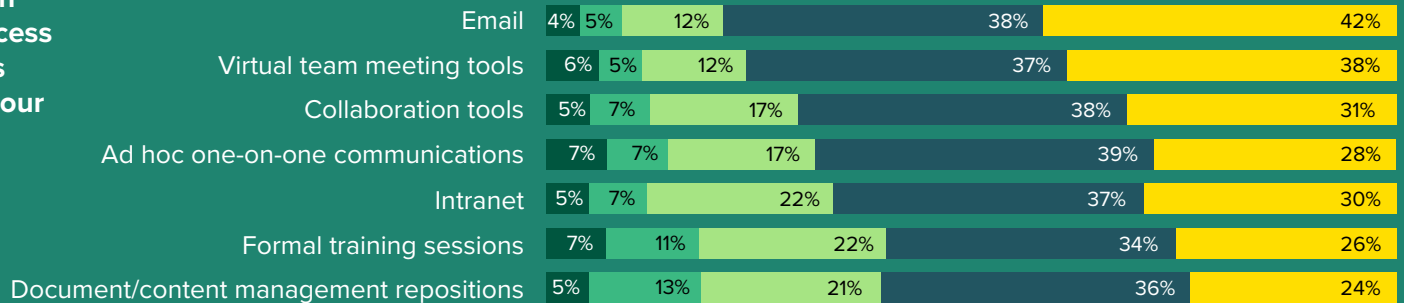


Inadequate Information Systems Drive Employees To Seek Answers From Colleagues

Employees rely heavily on information and knowledge held by their coworkers to do their jobs well, and they prefer personal, human-centered connections to address their information needs. Thirty-five percent of knowledge workers say that individuals hold most of the information in their organizations and it's not sufficiently documented. They also rate personal connections and interactions as most effective in helping them resolve problems quickly. However, hybrid work has made it harder for employees to build their networks. Furthermore, while these personal connections are effective in one-on-one situations, they create more barriers to knowledge sharing within the organization, as the information shared is often contained within a defined and narrow set of people. It requires staff to know which workers to contact.

“How satisfied are you with the following capabilities/apps in facilitating fast access to urgent business questions within your organization?”

● Very unsatisfied ● Somewhat unsatisfied ● Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied ● Somewhat satisfied ● Very satisfied



Organization Size, Culture, And Hierarchy Create Barriers To Reaching Out

A prevalent problem in organizations today is that employees simply cannot know everyone in the organization: 28% of respondents say their organization is too large to know who might have answers, and 25% say they often don't know who to contact when a problem arises. Furthermore, many employees are still reluctant to reach out to others outside of their network: 24% say they are afraid of seeming incompetent for asking questions and 22% say that their organizational norms make it difficult to reach out to senior leaders.

Coupled with the inefficiencies of current knowledge management systems, this creates knowledge silos that prevents knowledge from flowing freely across teams and networks. Hybrid working models further hamper this, which makes it even harder for employees to connect with coworkers.

“What challenges, if any, do you face with your organization’s current approach to collaboration at scale?”

My organization is too large to even know, if anyone, might have the answer to my question(s).

28%

I don't know who the best subject matter experts are to contact.

25%

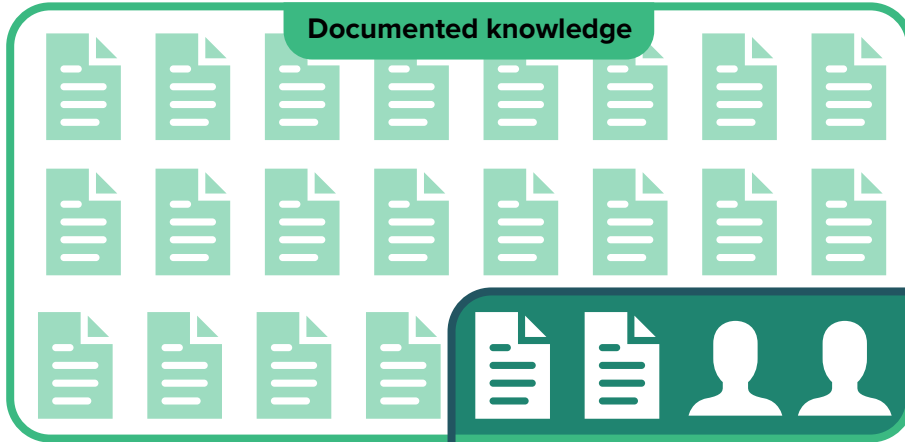
I am often reluctant to reach out for information as others may perceive me as “incompetent.”

24%

Organizational norms and culture make it difficult for me to reach out to senior leaders or coworkers.

22%

Most knowledge within an organization remains inaccessible by employees, creating a costly blind spot for organizations.



Challenges with documented knowledge:

- Inaccessible
- Outdated
- Redundant

Challenges with relying on people:

- Can't know everyone
- Hierarchy prevents easily reaching out
- Don't feel comfortable reaching out



Knowledge Silos Cost Business Wasted Time And Resources

Not being able to locate the right information or expertise leads to wasted time and productivity, with 63% of employees saying they spend too much time searching for the right people or information to help them. Compounded over thousands of employees, the wasted time can amount to significant productivity costs for an organization.

Twenty-nine percent of respondents feel they make compromised decisions based on assumptions formed when they cannot get the answer they need. This can become a costly business problem, as organizations then have to spend additional time and resources fixing problems or repairing relationships with customers to get things back on track.

“What is the impact of these challenges on your organization/the way you work?”



63%

of employees say they spend too much time getting a resolution.



29%

of employees make compromised decisions based on assumptions when answers are not available.



37%

of employees become increasingly disengaged as they feel frustrated and overwhelmed.

Siloed Working Disrupts The Employee Experience

Siloed working can escalate into longer-term issues for organizations down the road.

Firstly, knowledge workers depend on information to perform their jobs, and the inability to access information quickly and reliably can be frustrating for employees. Thirty-seven percent of respondents agree that these frustrations make them feel disconnected to their workplace.

Secondly, knowledge workers also want the opportunity to contribute their own knowledge to others. Thirty-eight percent of respondents felt that collaboration challenges they see in their organizations are leading to an underutilization of employee skills and expertise.

“What is the impact of these challenges on your organization/the way you work?”

Employees spend too much time searching for relevant and up-to-date information.

45%

Employees spend too much time searching for the right people to help solve a business problem.

39%

Employees' skills or expertise go underutilized.

38%

Employees become increasingly disengaged as they feel frustrated and overwhelmed.

37%

Employees make compromised decisions based on assumptions when answers are not available.

29%

It hinders innovation within our organization.

22%

It lowers our organization's agility or responsiveness to changing business conditions.

22%

None of the above.

8%

63% of employees say they spend too much time getting a resolution.



Collaboration And Knowledge Sharing Drives Business Growth

Improving the employee experience and knowledge retention are more critical now as companies grapple with the shift to anywhere-work strategies and the “Great Resignation.” Forrester’s Employee Experience (EX) Index research has found that equipping workers with the right tools is essential to fostering engagement in employees, and that having engaged workers improve customer satisfaction by 10% and lift sales by 20%.¹

Organizations risk losing knowledge with every employee that leaves if they do not have a solution in place to capture and share their expertise. These losses lead to more time wasted as remaining employees search for new information sources they can trust.

Equipping workers with the right collaboration tool is essential to fostering engagement in employees, regardless of location. Engaged workers:

Improve customer satisfaction by

10%



Lift sales by

20%

Employees Want Quick, Efficient Resolutions To Their Questions

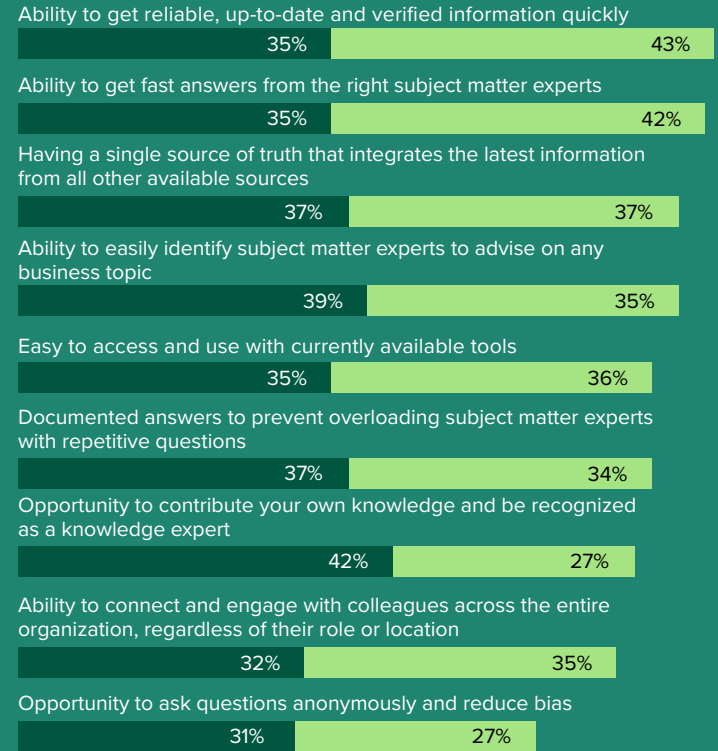
Considering the uncertainty and reluctance many employees have about reaching out, two-thirds of respondents find that being able to connect and engage with colleagues no matter their job role or location would be valuable. Fifty-eight percent also find the opportunity to ask questions anonymously would also be valuable, as that would allow them to reach out without the fear of being perceived as incompetent — one of the key inhibitions respondents have about seeking help from others.

Additionally, 74% of respondents say they are focused on using a knowledge platform to find expert help, and 69% think it would be valuable if they could contribute their own knowledge.

Therefore, organizations need to implement systems to facilitate inter-employee connections and break down barriers to collaboration.

“How valuable would the following features or capabilities of a knowledge platform be for you?”

● Valuable ● Very valuable



Conclusion

The modern workplace presents organizations with new challenges to knowledge sharing and collaboration. To create a productive and empowered workforce, organizations must:

- **Connect people and break down silos.** As employees become more dispersed, organizations need to foster connections among employees to prevent knowledge silos.
- **Empower employees to get resolutions efficiently.** Employees waste too much time searching for information and need a system to get reliable answers.
- **Keep knowledge circulating in the company.** Foster collaboration to prevent a loss of knowledge as subject matter experts leave the company.
- **Alleviate reluctance employees have on reaching out.** Beyond giving employees the tools to connect with others, organizations must enable them to seek information and answers without inhibitions or discomfort.

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Methodology

This Opportunity Snapshot was commissioned by Starmind. To create this profile, Forrester Consulting supplemented this research with custom survey questions asked of 301 knowledge workers in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the US. The custom survey began in December 2021 and was completed in January 2022.

ENDNOTES

¹ Source: "Effective Enterprise Collaboration Grows Your Bottom Line," Forrester Research, Inc., November 13, 2020.

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Demographics

| GEOGRAPHY | |
|---------------|-----|
| United States | 50% |
| Germany | 23% |
| Switzerland | 18% |
| Austria | 9% |

| RESPONDENT LEVEL | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Senior Management | 34% |
| Midmanagement | 34% |
| Nonmanagement | 33% |

| ORGANIZATION SIZE | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| 3,000 to 3,999 employees | 25% |
| 4,000 – 19,999 employees | 42% |
| 20,000 or more employees | 33% |

| INDUSTRY | |
|---|-----|
| Business or professional services | 21% |
| Consumer product goods and/or manufacturing | 21% |
| Manufacturing and materials | 21% |
| Financial Services and/or insurance | 19% |
| Pharmaceuticals | 18% |



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