Reinventing work in development teams

How software teams use Slack to stay productive and engaged in a WFH world

slack

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Showing a
better way

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Software engineering teams were often among the best placed to adjust to 2020's shift to working from home (WFH). While colleagues in other parts of the enterprise had to get to grips fast with remote collaboration and asynchronous work, many development teams were already embracing more flexible ways of working—whether they were in co-located DevOps or distributed engineering teams.

As we move into a new world of work, those development teams have the chance to take a leadership role. The agile processes that serve software engineering well can become a template for a new style of work across the whole business. And the tools that software teams use to stay aligned and productive can bring new levels of efficiency to everyone in the organisation.

The power of Slack to move work forward efficiently

This guide is about one of those tools. Today thousands of software engineering teams around the world use Slack as their central collaboration platform to stay connected, work productively and align around common goals.

If your team isn't among them, this guide will give you a good sense of what Slack can do. And if your team is using Slack, it will show how you could help the rest of your organisation to work more efficiently with Slack too.

Five themes dominate the new world of work

What makes this a good time to consider Slack? Throughout 2020, we talked to business and IT leaders about how their world was changing and what comes next for them. Five big themes emerged (explored in our e-book "**Reinventing Work**"):

1. Employee engagement breaks free from the 9-to-5 mindset

2. Culture and alignment are the next source of advantage

3. The ecosystem economy demands a new partner playbook

4. Customer-led disruption forces the CX convergence

5. The winners are accelerating and automating work

All of these themes demand new ways of working—and better ways of collaborating. We'll look at the opportunities and imperatives they create for engineering, product management and DevOps teams, and show how leading organisations are rising to these challenges with Slack.

1.

Employee engagement breaks free of the 9-to-5 mindset

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In teams where people mostly work remotely, keeping people engaged and holding on to engineering talent can be tough.

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The battle for the tech talent is such that potential staff often have competing offers from different companies, so being seen as less flexible than another company could be the decisive factor in losing out on talent."

Stewart Butterfield, Co-Founder and CEO, Slack

The quarterly Remote Employee Experience Index surveys we've been running since the start of the pandemic showed that WFH initially led to a sharp downturn in employees' sense of belonging. One year on, it was still the area of least satisfaction. That's a red flag, because employees who don't feel part of the organisation are less likely to give their best and more likely to leave.
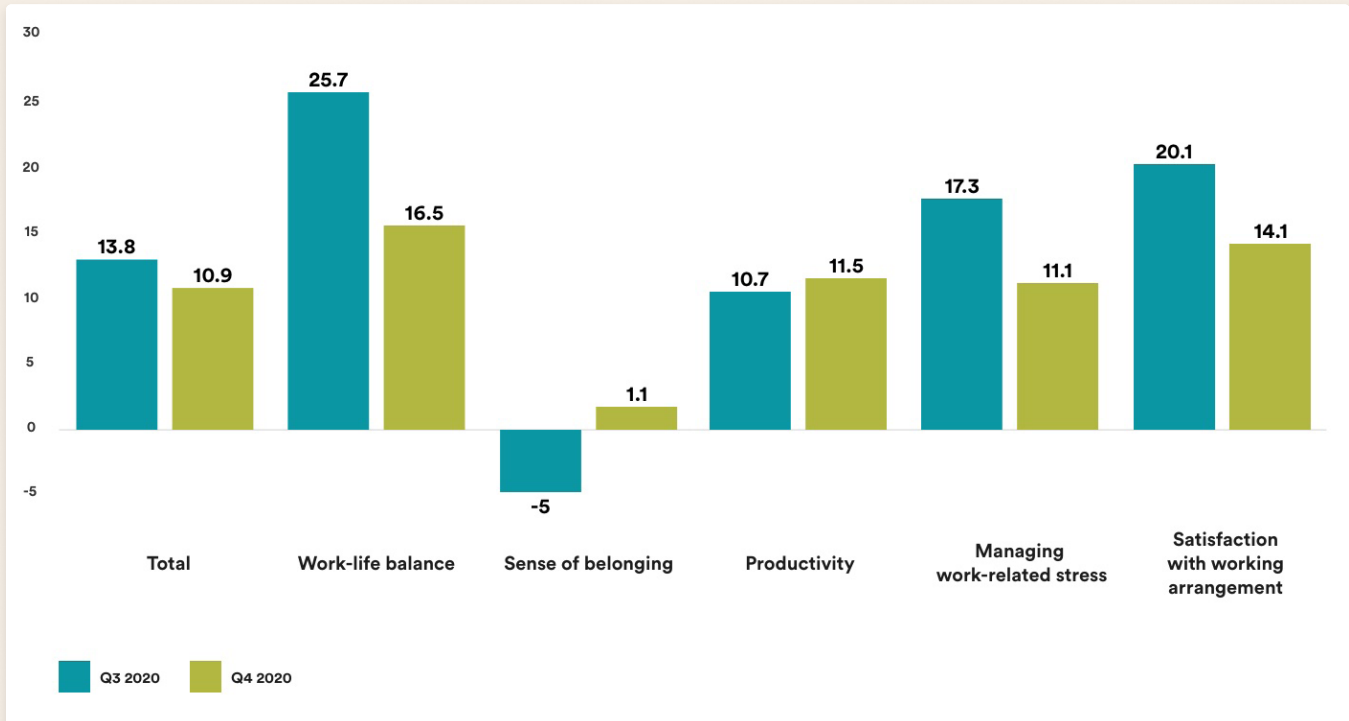
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Turnover costs an average of 50% of your employee's salary.

G&A Partners

Employee engagement breaks free of the 9-to-5 mindset

Note: The highest and lowest potential scores are +100 and -100, respectively. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction with remote work compared with office-based work; lower scores, a lower satisfaction. See footnote for detailed methodology.

Source: Future Forum

It's an area where other lines of business can learn a lot from engineering. Software teams that were already physically dispersed, with onshore and offshore resources working across time zones, have developed ways of feeling connected, aligned and as if they're "one team."

For many of those teams, Slack plays a key role in creating that sense of belonging. It provides a central space for developers to come together, discuss projects and actions, and get work done. Devs love how they can shape Slack to reflect how they naturally work, with unlimited channels for specific topics and customisable notifications, so they stay on top of what's important and filter out unnecessary noise.

Slack channels also support both asynchronous and real-time discussions, and preserve a record of decisions and requests. That means it's easy for teams working different hours to stay in the loop without having to work late or get up early for stand-ups and meetings. And it's ideal for people who—like many developers—do their best work outside of traditional office hours.

Iress forges a sense of connection across eight countries

Melbourne, Australia-based financial services software company Iress, for example, has 2,000 employees working across 19 offices in eight countries. To maintain its fast pace and continue delivering innovative software, the company set out to transform internal operations. One way it did that was to let its employees choose a platform for collaboration and information sharing.

"Our users tried all the options and told us they loved Slack," says Manqing Zhao, Head of Workplace Technology at Iress. From leadership to customer support, Slack made the globally distributed company feel smaller and increased efficiencies across borders. Just four months after deployment, 62% of employees reported that Slack made them feel more connected.

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Our users tried all the options and told us they love Slack."

Manqing Zhao, Head of Workplace Technology, Iress

Making new joiners feel welcome

Hybrid and remote working are freeing business teams to recruit beyond the geographic area of the office—often for the first time. It's a great opportunity to tap into new talent pools, including underrepresented groups. But it also creates a challenge: how to make new joiners feel welcome and included when they can't come into the office and meet their new colleagues.

It's a sticking point that many software teams have resolved with Slack. Because team members are already working in Slack, it creates a welcoming environment from day one. Slack's search capabilities and company directory let new joiners find and connect with the right people, while channels provide a living record of work, making it easy to get up to speed with projects.

> **Organisations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%.**
>
> **Glassdoor**

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Solarisbank makes new hires feel part of the team

At **Solarisbank** in Germany, new employees receive an invitation to the Slack workspace on their first day. They each have a mentor from the People and Organisation team, who introduces them and posts their photo in the **#general** channel. The new employee's work team then chimes in with information on which areas and projects they'll be working on.

Solarisbank's Head of Culture, Sandra Schaarschmidt, waits until the new employee's second day to get in touch. "I say a quick hello, explain my role and share more general information that's important for them," she says. "Many use that moment to ask general questions, and then the ice is broken."

The casual but effective Slack onboarding process has been well received, Schaarschmidt says. "I've already gotten feedback that the new employees generally feel well supported because they're immediately given a number of contact points in Slack."

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It immediately shows the new employee the importance of Slack. They realise: 'This is where communication and interaction happens. This is where I can get involved."

Sandra Schaarschmidt, Head of Culture and Office Management, Solarisbank

The virtual watercooler

One of the most-missed aspects of office life for newly remote teams is the informal chats and serendipitous encounters that take place at the watercooler or in the coffee line. They not only offer a welcome break from work but can also spark conversations that lead to new projects, innovations or career progression opportunities.

Many developer teams replicate those moments virtually with app integrations in Slack. Off-the-shelf apps like Donut set up video encounters between randomised pairs of coworkers, while other teams have enjoyed creating their own custom apps.

Australian bank **Up**, for example, built a custom Slack integration called Barista. It randomly matches colleagues for a digital coffee date, setting up a time and a topic of conversation. "It makes it easy to get to know each other and have conversations not just about work, but other things that matter to us as people too," says Up co-founder Dominic Pym.

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Barista makes it easy to get to know each other and have conversations not just about work, but other things that matter to us as people too."

Dominic Pym, Co-Founder, Up

2.

Culture and alignment are the next source of advantage

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In a hybrid working world, it's hard to keep one team engaged and aligned around goals and priorities, let alone the whole organisation.

As many businesses have found, old-school command-and-control management styles don't work well in a remote work environment. It's easy for vital communications to be missed—and harder for leadership to take the pulse of how employees are feeling.

In a time of heightened stress and anxiety, that can lead to loss of alignment, lower morale and more employee burnout. By contrast, organisations that entered the WFH era with a transparent approach to knowledge sharing have succeeded in keeping teams motivated and aligned.

> **Organisations that increased transparency with employees after March 2020 experienced an 85% increase in employee engagement.**
>
> O.C. Tanner

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For many, Slack emerged as the platform of choice for two-way internal communications, hosting everything from CEO Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions to employee pulse polls.

TINYpulse APP 5:12 PM

Hey Lee! 👋

"How happy are you at work?"
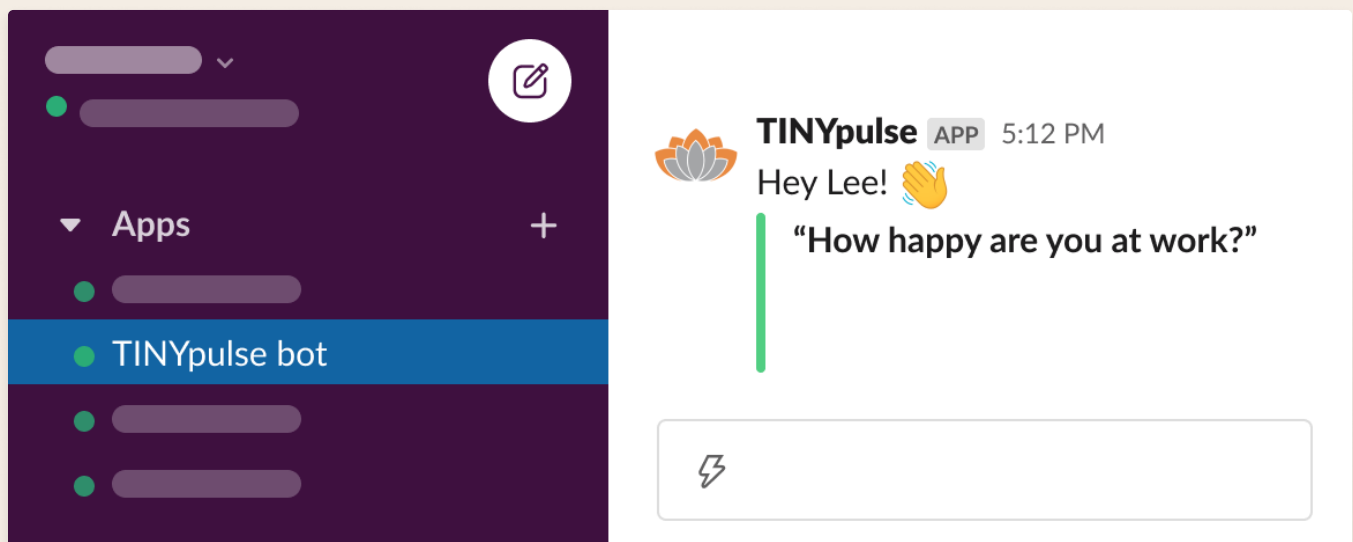
Slack's unlimited channels mean it's easy to set up dedicated channels for company announcements and Q&A sessions with senior leadership. Emojis make it easy for employees to indicate their thoughts and feelings about specific communications, while threads make it easy to reply and see how others have replied.

Because Slack is a two-way street, employees feel more involved in company announcements than they do with the old-style CEO email—and are less likely to overlook vital information as a result.

Twitter hosts virtual all-hands on Slack and Google Meet

At **Twitter,** responding to the pandemic meant transitioning the company's 4,900-strong global workforce into an all-remote team.

It had already been using Slack for years, but now needed to move conversations and meetings that had previously occurred in person to the platform. On 4 March, 2020—shortly after deciding to go fully remote—Twitter successfully held its first-ever virtual all-hands meeting.

It used Google Meet for video conferencing, while workers responded and asked questions in the **#oneteamQs** Slack channel. The most striking outcome was the level of employee engagement. Teammates chimed in, responding to each other with emoji reactions and follow-up replies. Facilitators divvied up the responses and answered questions in the channel.

"It was very transparent," says Jennifer Christie, Twitter's VP of People. "Everyone knew which questions were being asked and what we were answering. I think it'll be hard for us to ever think about doing it a different way."

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Jennifer Christie, Vice President of People, Twitter

Twitter's tips for virtual all-hands meetings:

- Encourage questions throughout the presentation. This helps people to express thoughts as they arise and allows more questions to be answered during the meeting.

- After the all-hands, review the Slack channel and answer everything that you weren't able to address live.

- Provide written responses to all questions in Slack for transparency and to create a searchable archive.

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3.

The ecosystem economy demands a new partner playbook

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One of the most intriguing aspects of remote working is that organisational boundaries become less defined. When people collaborate digitally rather than in an office, the distinction between "working with colleagues" and "working with partners" starts to melt away.

That's accelerating a move towards an "ecosystem economy," where multiple organisations work together to create new products, services and experiences. The more easily they can collaborate—while still maintaining security—the faster that new value can be created.

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It is less and less likely that single firms can offer all the elements a customer needs. And so ecosystems, especially designed ones, are on the rise."

Harvard Business Review

Here again, engineering teams have the advantage of experience. Remote working, outsourcing and onshore-offshore teaming have been staples of software development for many years. By adopting agile methodologies and tag-teaming across time zones, dispersed software teams have achieved impressive levels of productivity, quality and cohesion.

The tools they use play a central role in that, creating a common technology foundation for everything from gathering user stories to orchestrating deployments. And the most productive teams have found better tools than email for external collaboration too.

Snowflake collaborates with 360 partners in Slack

Take Snowflake, a fast-growing software company that offers data analytics, data warehousing, data tools and the cloud, all on one platform. It needs to collaborate internally and externally on everything from IT support to vendor relationships—and for that, it uses **Slack Connect**.

Slack Connect is a better way to work with people outside the company—bringing them into the internal Slack rather than communicating by email or phone. It's a secure way to make work with external partners happen faster, while still maintaining visibility, reliability and control.

With Slack Connect, **Snowflake** is widely sidestepping email with partners and vendors—choosing instead to share 580 Slack channels with more than 360 external organisations.

That hasn't just speeded things up; it's also maximised the value of vendor relationships. By creating a Slack channel to collaborate with incident response platform PagerDuty, for example, Snowflake has been able to make much wider internal use of the PagerDuty software.

"Having the ability to message an external vendor via Slack provides next-level support," says Marisa Guarino, senior IT systems engineer at Snowflake. "The run-around you usually have to go through via email does not exist when you use channels."

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The ability to message an external vendor via Slack provides next-level support. The runaround you usually have to go through via email does not exist when you use channels."

Marisa Guarino, Senior IT Systems Engineer, Snowflake

4.

Customer-led disruption forces the new CX convergence

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Customer experience (CX) was one of the biggest differentiators for businesses even before the upheavals of 2020. Then the year of staying home and working remotely further transformed the way people buy—and their expectations of the companies they buy from.

Customers have come to want and expect an effortless digital experience, whether they're ordering a takeout coffee via an app or digitally signing a multimillion-dollar IT contract on a video call with a sales rep.

The reduction in face-to-face contact means entire customer journeys are now happening digitally—from awareness to research, purchase and support. The smoother and more consistent that journey, the more confidence the customer will have in the business and the more loyal they're likely to be.

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Three priorities will define customer experience in the post-pandemic era: digital excellence, safe and contactless engagement, and dynamic customer insights."

McKinsey

Software engineering teams play a critical role in ensuring an exceptional digital customer experience. They need to be able to deliver new customer-facing features fast and ensure incidents are resolved before they impact customers. Increasingly, engineering teams are finding it's easier to do those things when they work together in Slack.

Ship high-quality customer-facing code fast

Bringing software engineering teams together in Slack helps them move from planning to deployment in record time and deliver higher-quality products and features faster than competitors.

Slack not only creates a platform for easier collaboration, it also speeds up work by integrating key development tools into the Slack platform. That means less time

spent context-switching between apps, increasing developer productivity and helping them ship high-quality code fast.

Improve service reliability

Slack also helps engineering, operations and support teams resolve incidents faster by making sure that urgent alerts reach the right people and that response teams have a central place to troubleshoot without interruption.

Slack integrations with leading incident-management tools mean support teams can alert developers fast to customer-highlighted issues, and developers can jump straight onto those alerts without leaving Slack. And because Slack makes it easy to tag people into conversations, it's quick to assemble a team to swarm around an incident for rapid resolution.

What's more, historical records are automatically documented in Slack channels, so it's easy to find information for post-incident analysis.

Autodesk resolves incidents faster with Jira and PagerDuty integrations

At **Autodesk**, customers wanted to access their software and data from the cloud, not just from the desktop. That led Autodesk to transition to a platform company and to integrate and unify its product experience.

"When you're telling teams to build software for the cloud, as opposed to an individual desktop, you're talking about a monumental shift in the way we develop software," says Guy Martin, Director of Open Source at Autodesk. The shift required some massive changes to the way Autodesk does business—and that's where Slack comes in.

Before Slack, for example, some urgent incidents were managed through a combination of phone and email. The process simply wasn't quick enough.

Now engineering teams use Jira and PagerDuty integrations in Slack to resolve incidents faster. When an alert is sent out from the PagerDuty integration, a Slack channel is created using the incident outage number. Engineers who see the outage jump into the channel, test different solutions and relay results back to the group until the incident is resolved.

"The ability to have this real-time tool is hugely impactful," Martin says. "And the results of those outages are archivable, which has helped engineers solve future issues quickly. Anecdotally, Slack has a lot of impact on our mean time to repair and the ability for us to remedy problems."

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Guy Martin, Director of Open Source, Autodesk

5.

The winners are automating and accelerating work

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Automation has a key role to play in organisational efficiency and customer responsiveness. Teams that can automate routine tasks are more productive and deliver more value, as they make time to work on ideas that will differentiate the business.

In software engineering, this isn't a new idea. Software teams have long been used to creating productivity hacks that make their work more efficient. And automation is a core principle of the DevOps methodologies that many teams use to write, test and deploy new code fast.

That's partly why so many engineering teams use Slack for collaboration. Slack makes the software delivery lifecycle even faster and more efficient through two core capabilities: dev toolchain integration and workflow automation. And they're both so simple to use that anyone in the organisation can automate routine processes with Slack—and reap the benefits.

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The Slack effect on developer productivity

24%
increase in features delivered on time

23%
faster time to market

21%
less time to identify and resolve engineering-related bug issues

[1] IDC Research, The Business Value of Slack, 2017

Unlock productivity with Slack integrations

Slack makes it easy for developer teams to spend less time on lower-value tasks and more time focused on product development and design. More than 2,400 apps can be integrated directly into Slack, removing the need to toggle between tools to get work done. That includes hundreds of the tools that DevOps teams use every day, including Jira, GitHub, Docker and Jenkins.

Australian workers estimated they are spending on average 22 minutes a day navigating between workplace apps. That's almost two hours a week and 95 hours a year—or 12 working days—of lost productivity.

Slack

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Riot Games improves feature delivery velocity with Slack integrations

At global games studio **Riot Games**, software engineering teams use Slack integrations to test, deploy, plan and manage operations within a Slack workspace.

One of its releases is *Legends of Runeterra*, a digital collectible card game for PC, Android and iOS. Making sure new versions are available simultaneously across all three platforms takes serious coordination, which is why the company's build and release process is a complex one involving Docker and Jenkins.

Riot's engineers have developed custom Slack apps to provide visibility into game builds and deploys in real time. Whenever a Legends of Runeterra build starts, a new message is posted into a Slack channel. If a build fails, an alert is automatically posted that includes a detailed accounting of what went wrong. It even @mentions the developer responsible for the last code change to begin immediate triage.

"Slack has had a dramatic effect on engineering productivity at Riot," says software engineering manager Byron Dover. "We've seen a reduction in iteration-cycle and bug-resolution times and increases in feature delivery velocity."

The winners are automating and accelerating work

ci (LoR Jenkins) APP 2:07 PM

Release/job/for_ 73930 _deploys_ testing

FAILING FOR 2 BUILDS:

3 in Build Server by @gkisel

❗ Found failure causes! If you don't know what to do about these, ask in #ask-lortech ❗

Generated by riotCommon.notify

[>_ Logs]   [🔵 Blue Ocean]   [📁 Artifacts]   [♻️ Rebuild]

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Slack has had a dramatic effect on engineering productivity at Riot. We've seen a reduction in iteration-cycle and bug-resolution times and increases in feature delivery velocity."

Byron Dover, Software Engineering Manager, Riot Games

Automate workflows for speedier development

Any repetitive process that eats up valuable time is ripe for automation—and Slack's drag-and-drop **Workflow Builder** makes process automation in Slack incredibly simple. It allows any Slack user to create custom workflows for day-to-day processes, like:

- Answering common requests (like, "What's the Wi-Fi password?")

- Reporting problems and outages

- Getting new team members up to speed

Loblaw streamlines workflows in Slack with Jeanie custom app

Loblaw, Canada's leading grocery and pharmacy provider, operates thousands of stores across the country. It uses Slack across its organisation to collaborate and carry out day-to-day tasks.

When its IT division, Loblaw Digital, sought ways to streamline common workflows, it decided to build a custom app for Slack. The app, called Jeanie, is designed to answer common requests and help users complete basic tasks faster.

For example, colleagues at Loblaw's grocery subsidiary, PC Express, can ask Jeanie to help with tasks like removing an online product listing. Previously, this could take up to a few hours. Now, with a simple slash command in Slack, users can fill in some blanks, review the changes and remove an inaccurate listing.

"The Jeanie app accelerates the time it takes for colleagues in the field to perform daily tasks," says Brandon Sam Soon, a software developer with Loblaw Digital. "What used to take an hour or two now takes seconds, and happens right within Slack."

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Brandon Sam Soon, Software Developer, Loblaw Digital

Methodology

The Remote Employee Experience Index is based on data from a survey of 9,032 knowledge workers who identify as "skilled office workers" in the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, Japan and Australia. It analyses the key perceptual elements of the working experience for 3,480 of the workers surveyed who are primarily working remotely. The survey was fielded between 25 November and 30 December, 2020, via GlobalWebIndex, a third-party online panel provider, and commissioned by Slack. Results were weighted based on sector and population.

To assess the impact of working remotely, each element is scored on a 5-point scale, from "much better" to "much worse" than working in the office, with the midpoint being "about the same as working in the office." The highest possible index score of +100 would indicate that, in aggregate, all remote knowledge workers feel much better about all elements of the Index. A neutral score of 0 would indicate no net change, and a score of -100 would indicate that employees feel much worse about working from home across each element.

Talk to us about supporting your new way of working

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Talk to us about supporting your new way of working

The shift to remote gave every organisation an opportunity to examine how work gets done and explore ways it can be done better.

Those better ways will involve more collaboration, more automation of routine tasks and new approaches to making people feel engaged and aligned. Software teams, with their existing experience of effective hybrid working, can play a leading role in making the changes happen.

The key to success in the new world of work will be a collaboration platform where internal teams and external parties can come together to move work forward faster. If you'd like to learn more about how Slack can improve the way your engineering teams work, **get in touch with our customer success team** today.

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This isn't some far-off future; this is now and next year and the year after that if we only embrace the opportunity to reimagine and the responsibility to reinvent."

Stewart Butterfield, Co-Founder, and CEO, Slack

About Slack

Slack has transformed business communication. It's the leading channel-based messaging platform, used by millions to align their teams, unify their systems, and drive their businesses forward. Only Slack offers a secure, enterprise-grade environment that can scale with the largest companies in the world. It is a new layer of the business technology stack where people can work together more effectively, connect all their other software tools and services, and find the information they need to do their best work. Slack is where work happens.

![slack logo]