State of Workflow 2020
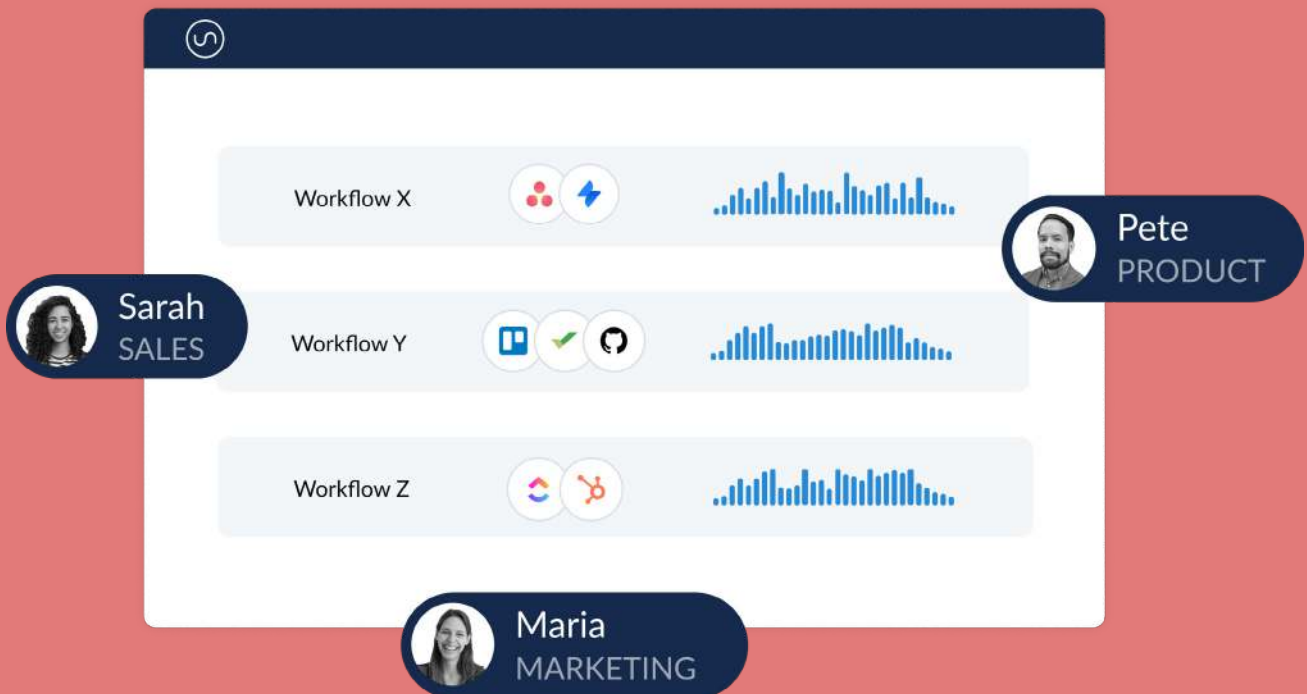## A guide for getting work done

Workflow X

Sarah
SALES

Workflow Y

Pete
PRODUCT

Workflow Z

Maria
MARKETING

unito

Work is messy.

The way we work is changing so rapidly we're all playing catch-up. Additionally, a global pandemic and economic crises upheaving whole industries, uncertainty, tension, speculation, and even fear are growing unchecked.

But it's not all doom and gloom. As we're trying to keep our heads above water, the boom in tech, tools, and tactics focused on work management is a wave we're all learning to ride. Work management has graduated from a buzzword to a true discipline for managers everywhere. It's also become a stepping stone for a newer, often misunderstood discipline: workflow management.

Workflow management empowers organizations to align, collaborate, and optimize work across teams more efficiently than ever. Deep, customizable workflows are being built, shared, and optimized to manage complex workflows and offer managers more visibility into how everyone works.

The technical core of workflow management is facilitating the flow of information, automating busywork, and spending less time on anything that isn't actual work. This gives organizations the ability to succeed and people in all roles to thrive, no matter what gets thrown at us.

Work is messy. But it's far from hopeless.

Welcome to the State of Workflow.

Thanks for reading,
Marc Boscher, Unito CEO

97%
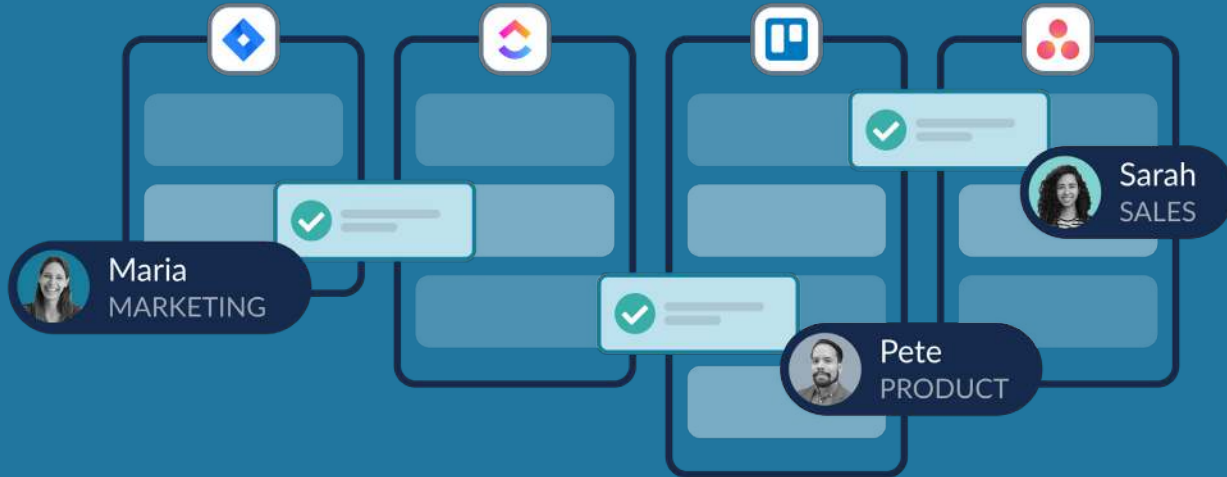
of employees and executives believe lack of alignment within a team impacts the outcome of a task or project.[29]

Executive summary

Think about that for a moment: that's only 3% away from literally every single person being in agreement. Can you get 97% of the people in a meeting to agree on anything?

With hybrid work becoming the default work setting, there is one challenge that companies must tackle to overcome misalignment: 70% of remote employees feel left out.[30]

As employees, managers, and executives, we have two options. We can throw up our hands and blame the inherent chaos that comes with the work we're doing. We'll feel better, but not much will get done.

Or?

We can gear up for an incredible journey of adaptation and evolve, reaping the bounty of a new world where work is built on trust and collaboration.

Each of us must play a role.. We'll need a new work culture, one built on trust and collaboration. Where everyone has the freedom to challenge assumptions, thrive in ambiguity, and take advantage of the opportunities chaos brings.

The current state of our workflows is clear, but so are the benefits of workflow management. Increased engagement. More efficiency. Better ROI on tools and initiatives. Greater retention.
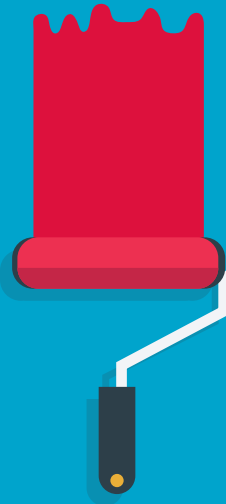
Let's do this.

Table of contents

Only
22%
of organizations use project management software

How we work today

How do we measure the "messiness" of work?

How about the number of apps used?

The average worker is using an average of 9 apps.[1] For enterprises, it's more like 200.[2] While 93% of organizations use standardized project management practices,[3] only 22% use project management software.[4] Confusing.

Work isn't just messy; it can get thoroughly chaotic.

Is it surprising that 20% of the average workday is spent on "crucial" and "important" things, while 80% of the average workday is spent on things that have "little value" or "no value"?[5] Or that 97% of Project Managers need more than one tool just to manage their projects?[6] Or that 46% of companies say they don't understand the importance of project management?[7]

This has led to a workforce that is increasingly siloed. Departments and teams have coped with the chaos by taking workflow management into their own hands. They're building customized stacks of apps and practices with or without IT's involvement.[8] These efforts show great initiative but also introduce new points of friction and greater divergence.

What project managers want in their software.

Five most used and requested features in PM software[9]

- File sharing
- Time tracking
- Email integration
- Gantt Charts
- Budget management

> **If you're working with a team,** you're relying on a team coordination workflow.
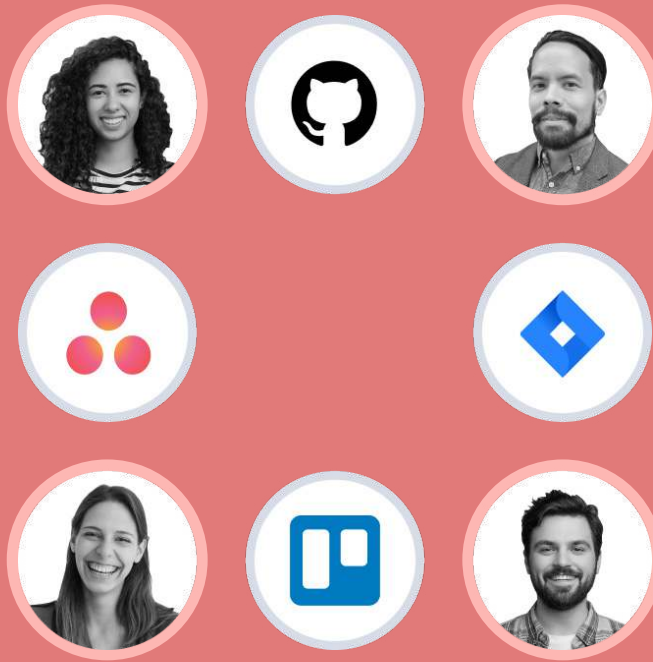
Workflow management use cases

With the recent explosion of SaaS tools, using disparate platforms across an organization has become an unfortunate norm rather than the exception. This has made working across teams more complicated, as each one stays where their work happens. Working together means working around tool choice and other hurdles.

Here are the main workflow management use cases we've found across hundreds of workflows.

Team coordination

If you're working with a team, you're relying on a team coordination workflow. Whether you're running a marketing campaign, launching a new product feature, or managing a customer success team, you need to get visibility on workload and deadlines. As a manager, getting that information might mean jumping between tools to check in on progress across your team and setting up recurring meetings to make sure everyone's on the same page.

The team coordination workflow doesn't begin and end with specific projects. Rather, it encompasses everything a team is working on. That's why it requires consistent upkeep and optimization. Everything from adding new team members to a sudden shift to remote work can transform this workflow.
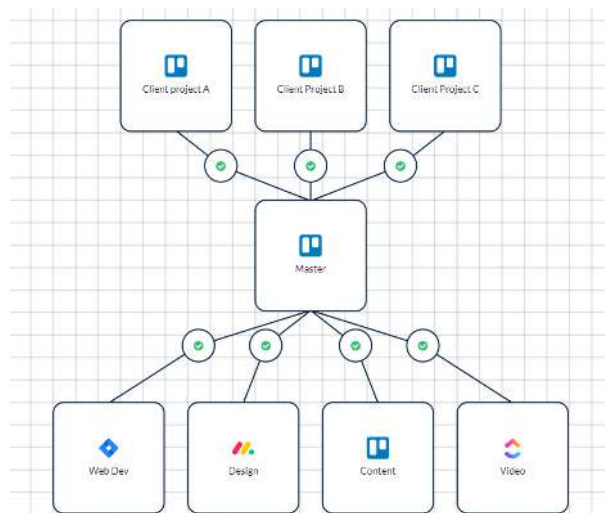
Project management

Where team coordination covers the continued collaboration of an individual team, project management workflows are bound by individual projects. Not only that, but these workflows typically cross team boundaries as well. Leading these workflows is typically up to a project manager, who has to coordinate efforts between people from across the organization, all while keeping the project on track and on budget.

Tool choice can complicate this workflow. Take the example of a website overhaul; this project can involve developers, marketers, and writers. If each of those roles exists in a different tool, someone needs to bridge the gap. Doing this without a workflow management solution can complicate work throughout the project's lifetime and delay deliverables.
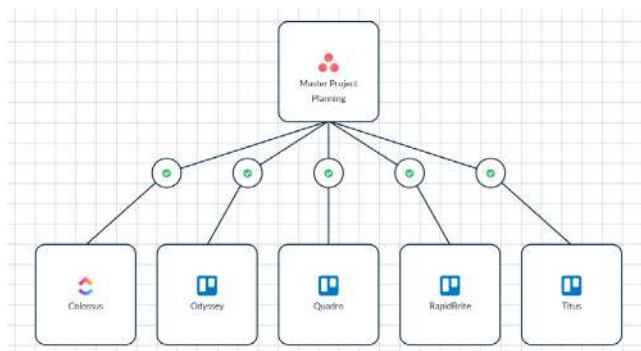
Support ticket escalation

For customer success teams, speed is essential. Their metrics are built around how much time it takes to get a customer from "I have an issue" to "thanks for your help!" But that transition isn't always on them. Sometimes, these teams need support from the rest of the organization to close their tickets. That's often where these workflows can run into problems. Escalating a ticket to a development team can mean anything from copy-pasting information between tools to physically walking down a few floors to talk to an engineer (true story).

Support tickets are essentially little bundles of information. They start with the initial customer request. Then, as they go through a workflow, they pick up information from subsequent customer interactions, engineering team input, and supervisor escalation. Managing this workflow is about keeping information up-to-date across platforms and teams. Otherwise, it feels like you're always playing catch-up.
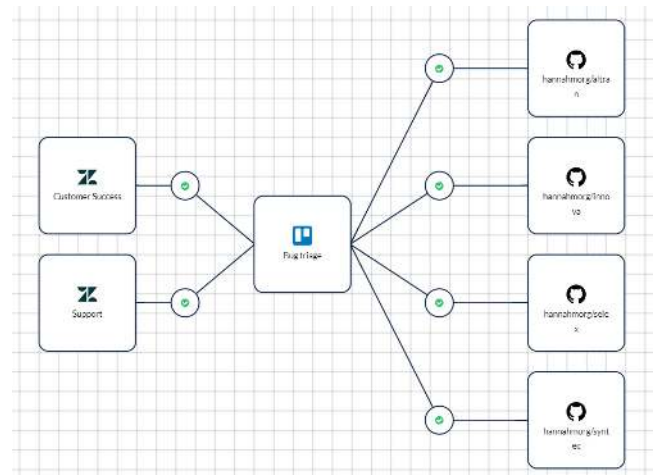
Product backlog

The product backlog is a catch-all for everything a development team needs to get done, from feature requests to bugs. A product backlog workflow covers the work needed to keep the backlog organized and systematically choose what to focus on before each sprint. The main issue with a backlog is that development requests don't come through a central channel. They're made through chat apps, email, even during water-cooler chats. This makes keeping a backlog organized kind of like pushing a boulder up an infinite hill.

Managing this workflow covers streamlining the journey of a request from its point of origin to the backlog. It involves proactively organizing the backlog without spending hours manually labelling issues and dragging them around your work management tool. Finally, it's about making the work of prioritizing and assigning requests feel less like busywork.
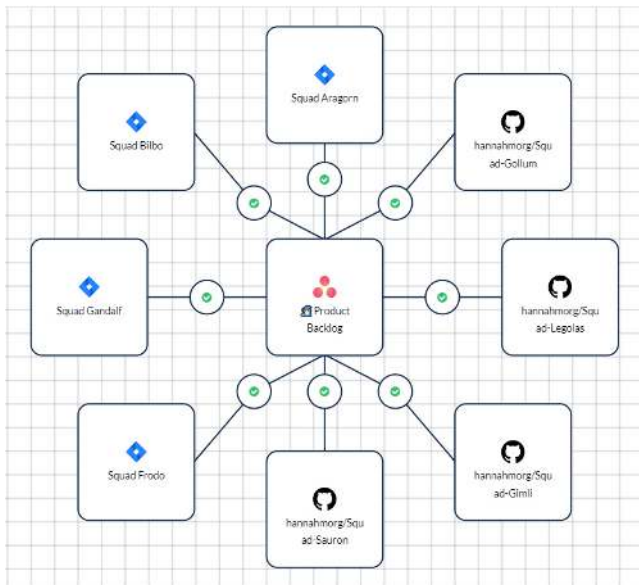
The takeaway

No matter what your organization is working on, that work is passing across teams. While the SaaS tool explosion has made some aspects of cross-team collaboration a bit more complicated, it's what made that collaboration possible in the first place.

But it's important to remember there are still challenges. Not all teams have found their "groove." They're still adopting, testing, and dropping apps, spending an average of $135,000 per company, per year, on this process.[10]

Having to work across teams exacerbates some of the difficulties inherent with collaboration. Getting visibility into a team's workflow is absolutely vital for project managers and managers of all stripes, no matter what the exact nature of the work is.

Issues

Major challenges emerge when teams become disconnected while their outputs become increasingly interdependent. This is becoming increasingly common in our new, remote-heavy working world.

From the managerial to the technical, there are many ways this negatively impacts workflows.

- Dense silos and misaligned teams
- Lack of progress visibility
- Increasing cost of tool adoption, education, and churn
- Tons of time lost to busywork

Clearly something has to change, but it's not easy. Twenty years ago, 70% of change initiatives failed;[10]

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now it's more like 75%.[11] Employees are clinging to what they know, making their workflows more complex and difficult to manage. Making progress requires a strategic initiative backed by sound evidence, empathic leadership, and community support.[12]

Managers are meant to lead this evolution, but they already have plenty on their plate. Juggling team management with other responsibilities is a manager's biggest challenge, far ahead of hitting team goals.[13] When up to 80% of the average working day is spent on activities with little or no value[14] where can we find the time needed to implement new initiatives?

Frustration flows up the chain. Executives are approving record spends on digital transformation and innovation. Each employee is costing a company $2,884 in SaaS.[15] It's estimated that by 2024, over 50% of all IT spending will go towards these, representing a compound annual growth rate of 17%.[16] When companies factor in a 30% SaaS app churn rate, long-term, effective solutions must provide tangible ROI.

So it's true; workflows can get messy. How do we clean them up?

Common complaints[17]

From Managers:
- I can't see at a bird's eye view what's happening in my team and if we are on track to meet our goals.

- If not, how can I optimize and take action?

- I'm swamped, plus I have all these projects to manage. I am stressed out and wasting time on tools and miscommunications

From Executives:
- I have no way to pilot key initiatives across the organization.

- I can't anticipate for major deviances in scope or timelines to address them early

- I can't see misalignment between my company and department strategy vs what is happening on the ground

From IT and Ops:
- I have the mandate to boost the ROI of existing tools but…

- Hard to have a reliable software IAM and security governance with the proliferation of SaaS within the workplace

- We are paying for multiple software licences that solve for the same problems

- I'm losing the battle with the number of software deployed internally

79%

of remote workers reported increased productivity and focus.
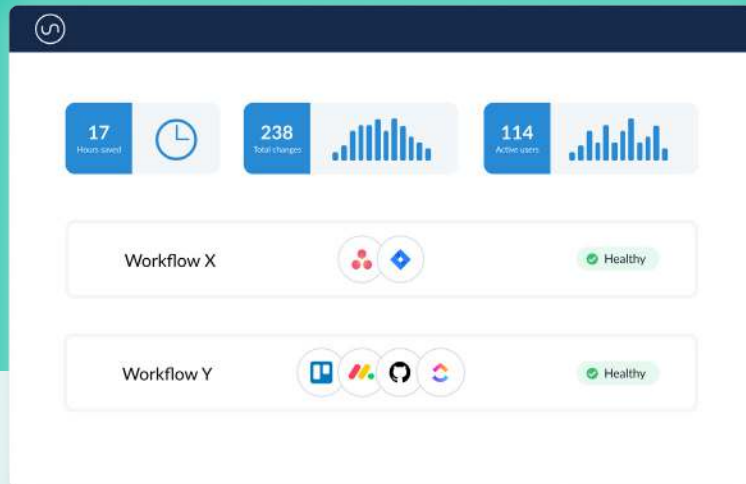
The benefits of effective workflow management

We've seen what years of siloed workflows have done. Teams are cohesive and efficient, as long as work stays within the team. Once they need to step outside the silo, they struggle to maintain that velocity.

The technology, tools, and techniques to change this are there. Let's take a look at how smart stack selection can create top-tier workflow management.

Employees

With the adoption of effective workflow management, employees can:[18]

- Reduce manual entry and request handling

- Focus on value-added projects and tasks

- Reduce errors and re-work

- Drastically reduce paperwork and busywork

- Spend less time in meetings

- Gain clarity into the organization's objectives

- Get more recognition for their contributions

In short, they can be more empowered, fulfilled, and satisfied at work.

Workflow management, paired with a collaborative culture, can do just that. It removes busywork, automating the least important tasks and getting everyone focused on what matters (instead of spending up to 69 days per year on mundane tasks).[19]

Managers

Stuck between keeping teams aligned and bringing business strategies to life, managers might benefit most from workflow management. This would mean being able to:

- Track task status in real-time
- Identify performance trends over time
- Keep teams aligned with organizational goals
- Identify and resolve workflow redundancies, barriers, and bottlenecks
- Eliminate circumvention of organizational business rules
- Streamline decision making
- Increase output and productivity

Managers can spend 30 minutes merely swapping between apps.[20] Forget finding, compiling, and analyzing information across them. Because workflow management facilitates the flow of information between tools, a manager can spend that time on something more productive, like cutting down on unproductive, inefficient meetings (71% qualifying as such).[21]

Remote workers

A transparent, established workflow system has a myriad of benefits for remote workers. By letting the manager know where the worker is at in their workflows without having the status meetings and video calls, these systems can reduce interruptions and keep workers in their own state of 'flow.'[22]

Remote work isn't going away. Just one day a month of working from home yields a 25% greater likelihood of feeling happy at work.[23] Transparent workflow management solutions make remote work easier, giving everyone access to its benefits.

Benefits like:[24]

- Better work-life balance (reported by 91% of remote workers)
- Increased productivity and focus (reported by 79% of remote workers)
- Decreased stress (reported by 78% of remote workers)

Remote workers even work longer hours than on-site workers by choice; they enjoy their work more.[25]

They also earn salaries of at least $100,000 a year twice as frequently as on-site workers, so there's that small perk to consdier as well.[26]
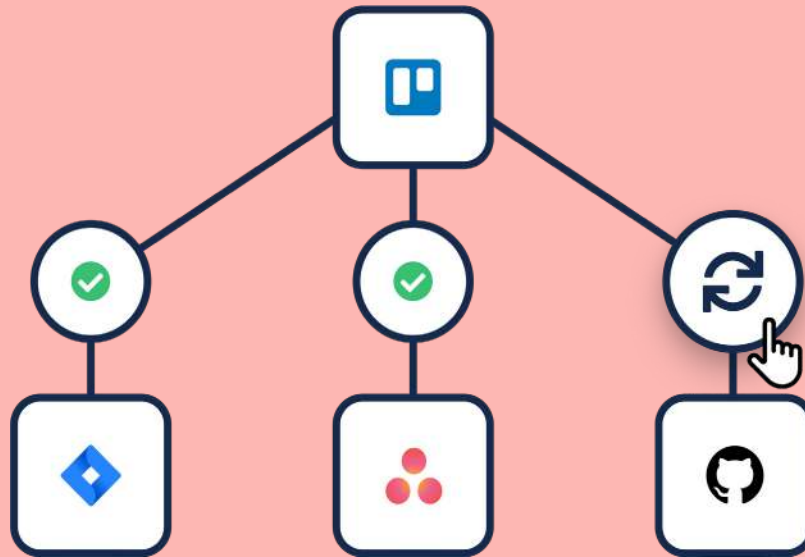
Six key ways to foster trust[28]

- Reliability and Dependability
- Transparency
- Competency
- Sincerity, Authenticity and Congruency
- Fairness
- Openness and Vulnerability

"Trust is to collaboration as a foundation is to a house."[27]

JULIE JEANNOTTE, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT EXPERT AND RESEARCHER, OFFICEVIBE BY GSOFT

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The future of workflow management

The way we work has seen some significant changes this past year. Organizations in every sphere have needed to adapt to new realities, adopt new technology, and figure things out fast.

Despite the circumstances that led us here, some of these changes will be for the better. Organizations that dismissed remote work as a fad will be able to give their employees more flexibility. The SaaS space will grow, diversifying to let in more players. And that's just the beginning.

Hybrid work will be the new normal

Remote work isn't just for digital nomads and the office hermit anymore. The COVID pandemic forced companies across the world to adapt to a new remote reality. Some were more prepared than others. Still, the change was a positive one.

While most organizations may not stay remote-first in the coming years, few will benefit from forcing their entire workforce to stay in the office 100% of the time. Now that so many of us have had a crash-course in making remote work, well, work, it'll likely become a normal part of the average organization. That means the future of workflow management will have to deal with a new, hybrid way of working. Tools and processes will need to account for employees who work remotely at least some of the time.

Hybrid work means carefully building the right tech stack and making sure it's on point. That includes a workflow management solution.

Tech-enhanced human management

Most managers don't want to spend their time dealing with the minutiae and busywork of management. The daily, manual assigning of tasks and reaching out to reports can be something of a slog. Managers aren't at their best when they're sifting through work management tools and entering data. They're there to lead people to a place where they can do their best work.

Tools across the SaaS space are already solving this problem. For example, automating repeated task delegation is possible through some of the most popular work management tools. As workflow management evolves, automation and synchronization will be possible across a workflow rather than in more niche circumstances. Managers will be empowered to focus on more important decisions and spend more time on the critical human elements of team management needed to make their team the best it can be.

Workflow performance evaluation

Many organizations have implemented performance tracking systems to deal with the sudden shift to remote work. These solutions can range from self-reporting how much time is spent on specific tasks to in-depth, holistic tools that can track a mouse cursor's idle time and take regular screenshots of a worker's screen.

If you're overly concerned about what your employees are doing throughout the day, track away. But as workflow management evolves, the performance tracking of individuals will likely give way to workflow performance tracking.

Many workers spend too much of their workday looking for information or trying to communicate across teams. As workflow management gains more of a foothold, there will be an emerging need for robust analytics. Managers will need to know how their workflows streamline work for their reports. Metrics might quantify synced information, time saved, and tools added to your tech stack.

Tools with built-in collaboration

There was a time when tools could assume that individual workers operate successfully in silos. With the huge, recent shift to remote work, that mindset will be a thing of the past. Not only have more tools been created to enable collaboration — from Slack to Miro — but soon every part of your tech stack will be built with collaboration in mind.

Historically, word processors were built to write in isolation. Now, they have collaboration-enabling features like the ability to share documents and comment on them in real-time. The word processor of the future will likely go beyond this, such as native integrations with work management tools perhaps.

For workflow management, the future is clear. There are still plenty of gaps between teams and their tools. The onus will be on every tool to have some way of bridging these gaps, coupled with a workflow management solution to bring it all together, not unlike a maestro and their orchestra.

More SaaS growth = a greater need for workflow management

The SaaS space has been growing for decades and shows no sign of stopping. That's nothing new. But in the coming years, this growth will cause a greater need for workflow management. It's simple logic; more available tools means more tools used within an organization. That, compounded with a greater reliance on tools as hybrid work becomes the new normal, means there will be a growing need for something that turns all these disparate tools into a single collaborative environment.

The workflow management space is still young. The expression alone has a long road before it becomes the buzzword that "agile" has turned into. The integration of work management tools is just starting to become mainstream, with work management giants like Asana and Atlassian developing their own native integrations. It's a strong first step. An explosive growth in workflow management is next.
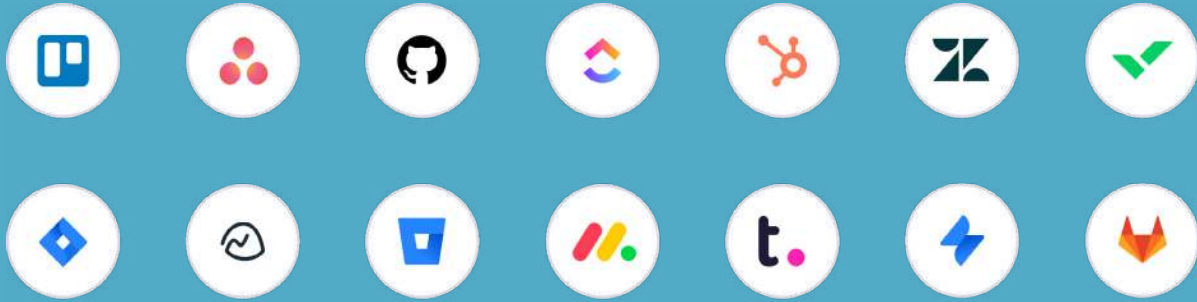
Connecting...

Collaboration will be harder, then easier

We're in an adjustment period. It started with organizations around the world being overwhelmed with tool choice and the average worker having to jump through an average of nine tools. The adjustment has been accelerated by a sudden, global shift to remote work.

As some semblance of normal returns to the world — and hybrid work becomes more common — we'll have the space to give this adjustment some real thought. Forcing a single tool across an organization will become a thing of the past, with integration emerging as the new default. From there, workflow management will take its place among the workforce of the future.

It'll seem hard at first. It will be hard at first. Things we all held dear will become obsolete, but they will be replaced by bigger, better things. Then, accomplishments we thought were difficult — or downright impossible — will become natural. We'll all be able to do more. We just have to get through this tough period first.

Methodology

All external data sources, including figures or ideas, are cited with URLs active as of September 23, 2020.

Internal research findings or quotes from contributing members are likewise cited with URLs active as of September 23, 2020.

Data for ___ was compiled via _____.

Interesting statistics

Stat and/or Fact
Source + link

65% of 182 senior managers said meetings keep them from completing their own work

HBR, the meeting trap July 2017

71% meetings are unproductive and inefficient

HBR, the meeting trap July 2017

97% of project managers use more than one tool to manage their projects
https://lab.getapp.com/project-management-software-features-report/

48 % of people use apps that weren't distributed by their IT department
https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170918005033/en/Information-App-Overload-Hurts-Worker-Productivity-Focus

The average number of apps used by the modern worker is 9.39
https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170918005033/en/Information-App-Overload-Hurts-Worker-Productivity-Focus

~200: the average # of SaaS tools in enterprises
https://www.blissfully.com/saas-trends/2019-annual/#ftoc-heading-2

70% of remote employees felt left out
https://www.igloosoftware.com/state-of-the-digital-workplace/

The worldwide market for social software and collaboration in the workplace is expected to grow from an estimated $2.7 billion in 2018 to $4.8 billion by 2023
https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/09-24-2019-gartner-says-worldwide-social-software-and-collaboration-revenue-to-nearly-double-by-2023

By 2023, the number of knowledge workers in the world will increase to 1.14 billion, with more than four-fifths of that growth coming from the emerging world.
https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/09-24-2019-gartner-says-worldwide-social-software-and-collaboration-revenue-to-nearly-double-by-2023

73% of organizations indicated nearly all their apps will be SaaS by 2021.
https://99firms.com/blog/saas-statistics/#gref

Companies spend an average of $2,884 per employee on SaaS.
https://99firms.com/blog/saas-statistics/#gref

38% of companies say they're running almost completely on SaaS
https://www.bettercloud.com/monitor/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/05/2017stateofthesaaspoweredworkplace-report-1.pdf

86% of polled executives and employees blame a lack of collaboration or bad communication for team problems and failures
https://blog.clearcompany.com/7-workplace-collaboration-statistics-that-will-have-you-knocking-down-cubicles

97% of employees and executives believe lack of alignment within a team impacts the outcome of a task or project.
https://blog.clearcompany.com/7-workplace-collaboration-statistics-that-will-have-you-knocking-down-cubicles

76% of organizations expect to implement more

agile techniques than traditional methods in the next three years.
https://financesonline.com/35-essential-project-management-statistics-analysis-of-trends-data-and-market-share/

46% of companies have come forward to accept that they do not understand the need or importance of project management.
https://www.proprofs.com/c/project/project-management-statistics-facts-trends/

85% of organizations believe that AI or project management software will significantly change the way they do business in the next five years.
https://www.proprofs.com/c/project/project-management-statistics-facts-trends/

Executives spend an average of nearly 23 hours a week in meetings
https://hbr.org/2017/07/stop-the-meeting-madness

59% of 500 surveyed employees feel less engaged due to number of meetings
https://smallbiztrends.com/2018/04/meeting-statistics.html

Executives consider more than 67% of meetings to be failures
https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-much-time-do-we-spend-in-meetings-hint-its-scary

The top challenges managers face are
- 68% Juggling managing my team with my other responsibilities
- 14% Hitting team goals
- 11% Getting my team to collaborate with one another"
https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/new-report-reveals-the-top-5-challenges-managers-face-897128732.html

67% of survey respondents in a harmon.ie study believe it would be easier to focus on work if important information from all their apps appeared in a single window.
https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170918005033/en/Information-App-Overload-Hurts-Worker-Productivity-Focus

Only 16% of knowledge workers say their company is effective at setting and communicating company goals
https://resources.asana.com/rs/784-XZD-582/images/Asana_Goals_Infographic_2020.pdf

Only 26% have a clear understanding of how their work contributes to company goals
https://resources.asana.com/rs/784-XZD-582/images/Asana_Goals_Infographic_2020.pdf

Employees using a collaborative work management tool like Asana are nearly twice as likely to say that they have a clear understanding of how their individual work relates to their company goals (84% vs 45%)
https://resources.asana.com/rs/784-XZD-582/images/Asana_Goals_Infographic_2020.pdf

20% of the average workday is spent on "crucial" and "important" things, while 80% of the average workday is spent on things that have "little value" or "no value".
https://dashboardstream.com/10-surprising-facts-about-productivity-and-performance/

PM software adoption remains low. As per Wellingtone's survey, only 22% of organizations use a PM software. Coincidentally, 55% of organizations don't have access to real-time KPIs. As a result, 50% of respondents said that they spend one or more days to manually collate project reports - highlighting the immense productivity gains on offer by using project management software.
https://www.workamajig.com/blog/project-management-statistics

71% would more likely to work for an employer that offered the opportunity work remotely
https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-

work/2019

83% of workers cite the ability to work remotely would make them happier
https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

Reasons for Working Remotely: 91% better work-life balance, 79% increased productivity/better focus, 78% less stress, 78% avoiding a commute
https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

Preferred benefits/perk for remote workers: biggest gaps in importance: Schedule flexibility 92%, Workplace flexibility 42%, Stock options 70%
https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

95% of project managers are willing to spend more for project management software, including for the missing features they need.
https://lab.getapp.com/project-management-software-features-report/

By 2024, over 50% of all IT spending will go toward digital transformation and innovation, up from 31% in 2018 and growing at a compound annual rate of 17%.
https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prUS45613519

The 62% of survey respondents who work remotely do so at different frequencies. 54% of respondents work remotely at least once per month, 48% work remotely at least once per week, and 30% work remotely full-time
https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

Footnotes

1. [Information and App Overload Hurts Worker Productivity, Focus and Morale Worldwide, According to New Independent Survey](#)

2. [The 3 Biggest SaaS Trends in 2020 | The Blissfully Report](#)

3. [Pulse of the Profession 2018: Success in Disruptive Times](#)

4. [Project Management Statistics: 45 Stats You Can't Ignore](#)

5. [10 Surprising Facts About Productivity and Performance](#)

6. [Invest in the project management software that's right for you](#)

7. [100+ Project Management Statistics & Facts (Updated 2020)](#)

8. [Information and App Overload Hurts Worker Productivity, Focus and Morale Worldwide, According to New Independent Survey](#)

9. [Project Management Statistics: 45 Stats You Can't Ignore](#)

10. [Cracking the Code of Change](#)

11. [Using Change Management to Change Organizational Culture | BCG](#)

12. [Changing change management](#)

13. [New Report Reveals the Top 5 Challenges Managers Face](#)

14. [17+ Little-Known Time Management Statistics For 2020](#)

15. [40+ Staggering SaaS Statistics to Know in 2020 - 99firms](#)

16. [IDC FutureScape Outlines the Impact "Digital Supremacy" Will Have on Enterprise Transformation and the IT Industry](#)

17. Survey of Managers conducted by Unito Research Team, 2019

18. [Workflow Process | Examples and Benefits](#)

19. [7 Benefits of Workflow Management System](#)

20. [The State of Work 2019 | Slack](#)

21. [Stop the Meeting Madness](#)

22. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Flow, the secret to happiness | TED Talk](#)

23. [The State of Remote Work Report by Owl Labs](#)

24. [2019 State of Remote Work Report](#)

25. [2019 State of Remote Work Report](#)

26. [2019 State of Remote Work Report](#)

27. [Webinar: Cracking the Code of Cross-Functional Collaboration](#)

28. [The Essential Importance Of Trust: How To Build It Or Restore It](#)

29. [7 Workplace Collaboration Statistics and Advice That Will Have You Knocking Down Cubicles](#)

30. [State of the Digital Workplace](#)