State of Deskless Work Report 2022

New research highlights the challenges deskless workers face amidst workplace evolution.

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Executive Summary

The past two years of distributed work and accelerated digital transformation have changed work for the better. Namely, today's knowledge workers benefit from unprecedented levels of autonomy and flexibility. But at the same time, workers who sit at a desk in a traditional office setting are increasingly rare and currently account for just 1 in every 5 employees around the world. The other 80% of the global workforce is deskless, traveling and operating in the field.

This workplace evolution impacts all of us, but much of the discussion has been focused on desk-based knowledge workers. So, we wanted to know: Have deskless employees experienced the same gains as desk-based workers or are divisions growing? And what does this mean for employers? To answer these critical workplace questions, Skedulo surveyed 500 deskless employees based in the United States, as well as 500 desk-based employees for comparison. We asked employees about their job experiences, expectations and thoughts about the current workplace evolution to discover how changes in autonomy, flexibility and technology impact deskless workers' satisfaction, productivity and retention.

Read on to learn what the findings of our **2022 State of the Deskless Work Report** could mean for you and your company.

This report will help you identify areas for improvement in enabling and retaining your deskless workforce. While gains have been made over the past year, today's deskless workers are still largely deprived of autonomy, ill equipped to handle increasingly dynamic and complex work environments, and face leadership that continuously prioritizes alternative investment areas.

Standout findings from this research include:

1. Deskless workers are looking for opportunities that provide greater autonomy and flexibility: Over half (51%) of deskless workers would leave their current jobs to gain access to more autonomy and flexibility.

2. Flexibility is just as important as pay: Nearly half (47%) of deskless respondents would rather work for an organization providing flexible scheduling and/or increased autonomy over one able to pay them 10% more.

3. Lack of purpose-built technology is a major obstacle for your workers: Cited as a major challenge, a quarter (25%) of deskless workers are hampered by insufficient technology and limited flexibility.

4. Better technology equals greater worker retention: Deskless employees empowered with sufficient technology are 2x as likely to be very satisfied with their job and over 50% more likely to stay at their job for the next five years.

Nearly half — 47% of deskless workers would prefer increased job autonomy and flexibility over a raise.

Deskless Workers Crave Autonomy and Flexibility

The pandemic gave employees a new level of control over how and when they work. But the deskless workforce — which includes home healthcare nurses, solar panel technicians, traffic control professionals and more — has historically lacked flexibility and autonomy over workflows, working hours and location.

When we asked deskless workers about their current versus desired levels of autonomy and flexibility, 77% of respondents said they wanted more autonomy, flexibility or both*. To reap these benefits over half (51%) of deskless workers would leave their current jobs and over a third (36%) would be willing to learn how to use new technologies.

Deskless workers' interest in more flexibility and/or autonomy:

40% — Yes
I want more flexibility

17% — Yes
I want more autonomy

20% — Yes
I want more flexibility and more autonomy

23% — No
I don't want my role to change

For reference, our survey defined autonomy as the ability to alter the nature or sequence of one's work without approval/supervision and defined flexibility as the ability to choose when/where one works.

Deskless worker responses on the most important effects of increased autonomy/flexibility

21%

More likely to stay at their job

22%

Better work-life balance

41%

More motivation at work
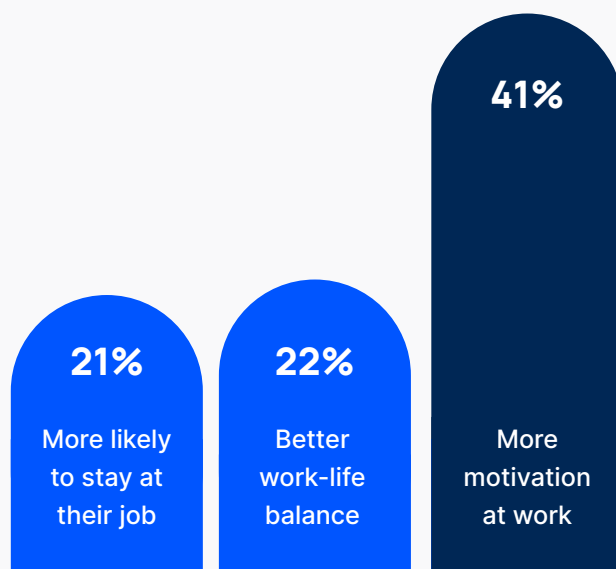
Equipping Your Workers with Greater Flexibility is Just as

Interestingly enough, deskless workers value flexibility and autonomy just as much as pay, with a significant portion of respondents preferring autonomy or flexibility over a raise. Nearly half (47%) of deskless respondents would rather work for an organization providing flexible scheduling and/or increased autonomy over one able to pay them 10% more.
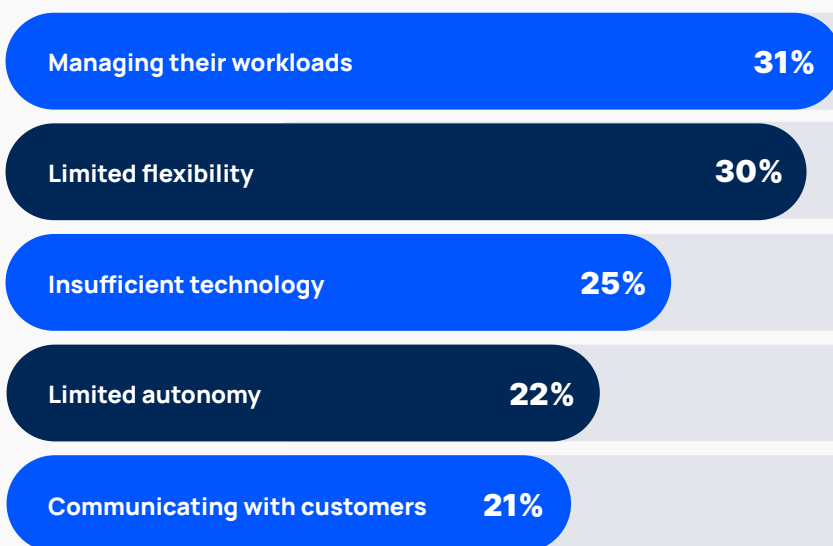
And there are benefits for organizations that enable their workers to be autonomous and flexible. When we asked deskless respondents about the most important effects of increased autonomy/flexibility, they cited more motivation at work (41%), a better work-life balance (22%) and being more likely to stay in their job longer (21%).

As companies across industries face serious employee engagement and retention hurdles, listening to workers and accommodating their preferences is a win-win — resulting in more motivated, happier teams and fewer open roles.

Reported five biggest challenges for the deskless worker

Managing their workloads	**31%**
Limited flexibility	**30%**
Insufficient technology	**25%**
Limited autonomy	**22%**
Communicating with customers	**21%**

Insufficient Technology is a Sore Spot for Deskless Workers

When we turn our attention to the parts of their roles deskless workers dislike, respondents reported their five biggest challenges are managing their workloads (31%), limited flexibility (30%), insufficient technology (25%), limited autonomy (22%) and communicating with customers (21%).

We're not surprised to see insufficient technology as a top-three challenge. The deskless workforce has long been underserved when it comes to technology that is purpose-built for their specific roles and responsibilities, with the vast majority of software funding going toward products for desk-based information workers.
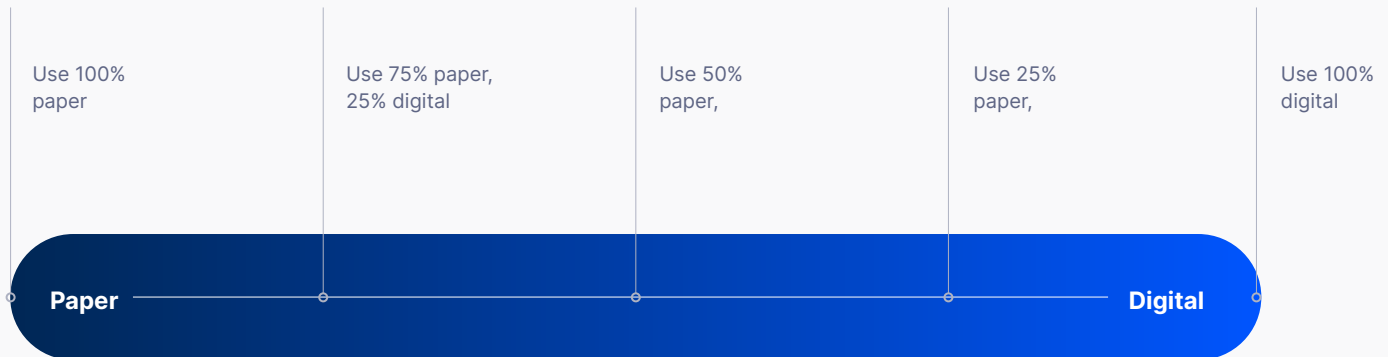
Our data confirms technology adoption for the deskless workforce lags well behind that of their desk-based counterparts, even after two years of rapid digital transformation and the proliferation of remote work. We see this divide, for example, in the rates of digital versus paper workforce processes across deskless and desk-based respondents:

- 15% of deskless respondents still use **mostly paper processes** (at least 75% paper-based processes or greater), vs. only 5% of desk-based respondents.

- 54% of deskless workers use **mostly digital processes** (at least 75% digital-based processes or greater), vs. 73% of desk-based respondents.

Workforce processes relying on paper vs digital tools broken down by percentage

| Use 100% paper | Use 75% paper, 25% digital | Use 50% paper, | Use 25% paper, | Use 100% digital |

Paper ————————————————————————————————— **Digital**

Lack of Purpose-built Technology Negatively Impacts Your Worker's

Lack of technology (or technology not built with the needs of deskless workers in mind) often compounds other challenges respondents cited. When workers lack the tools to quickly query information, communicate with colleagues and customers, and provide excellent customer support, they're hamstrung in what they can achieve in the field.

The good news is that organizations are working to bridge this gap. Technology adoption is increasing for the deskless workforce, albeit slowly. Seventeen percent of deskless respondents said their organization uses 100% digital processes — up from 6% in our 2021 State of the Deskless Work Research report. However, despite nominal gains, 83% of respondents are still using paper processes in some capacity.

Better Technology Improves Autonomy, Flexibility and Retention

When we asked deskless workers about their overall job satisfaction and intention to remain in their current roles, the results were mixed. Eighty-nine percent of deskless workers are very or somewhat satisfied with their current jobs. But over half (51%) of respondents plan to find a new job within the next six months to two years, and only a third see themselves staying in their current job for more than five years.

While deskless workers seem to largely enjoy their roles, they also aren't feeling tied down to a specific employer. And this makes sense. The U.S. workforce just experienced a year of record-breaking turnover in an employee-driven labor market. As a result, deskless workers are realizing their value as irreplaceable frontline employees providing essential services. They're more empowered than ever to seek out employers that match their work preferences — like increased autonomy. Rather than suffering through an unpleasant work experience, change is the more attractive option.

Fortunately, when deskless workers are equipped with purpose-built technology,

autonomy, flexibility, job satisfaction and retention improve. In fact, when comparing deskless workers who reported technology as sufficient versus deskless workers who reported technology as insufficient, we discovered significant differences in job outcomes:

- **Deskless employees with sufficient technology are more likely to say their jobs are very autonomous (42%) and very flexible (42%). They're more likely to be very satisfied with their job (44%) and plan to stay at their job for the next five years (35%)**

- **Deskless employees with insufficient technology are less likely to say their jobs are very autonomous (20%) and very flexible (27%). They're less likely to be very satisfied with their job (20%) and fewer plan to stay at their job for the next five years (23%)**

Don't let employees find what they're looking for elsewhere. Employers should pay close attention to the results of our study and survey their own workforce to identify opportunities to improve the employee experience for deskless workers.

Conclusion: The Ability to Empower and Retain Deskless Workers is in Your Hands

Ultimately, we found the digital transformation of deskless work still trails behind desk-based work — but the silver lining is that we're making progress.

Employers should feel empowered to address workers' concerns head-on and there's no time to waste. For the most part, deskless employees feel largely satisfied with their roles, albeit with a few specific challenges. Fortunately, the right organizational changes can resolve these challenges.

Purpose-built tools work best. Despite the initial upfront investment that comes with any new technology adoption, tools that are tailored to the complexities of deskless work pay dividends. Workers feel more autonomous, flexible, productive and happy in their roles — leading to better outcomes for employees and employers alike.

If you're interested in learning more about Skedulo's mission to champion the deskless workforce, connect with us.

Report Demographics

The survey was conducted by Walker Sands in partnership with Lucid, a Cint Group Company. The report surveyed 500 deskless and 500 desk-based full-time, U.S.-based workers. Deskless was defined as working at least 80% of the time as a mobile employee, and desk-based was defined as working at least 80% of the time at a desk. Respondents were between the ages of 18 and 75, ranged from entry-level to C-suite staff and worked in a wide range of industries. All responses were collected between April 29th and May 5th, 2022 via SurveyMonkey, an online survey platform.

About Skedulo

Founded in 2013, Skedulo is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Australia, Vietnam and the United Kingdom. Skedulo's leading Deskless Productivity Cloud solution powered by AI and machine learning empowers organizations to manage, engage and analyze their deskless workforce, supporting the 80% of global workers who don't work in a traditional office setting. Skedulo's platform helps enterprises intelligently manage, schedule, dispatch and support deskless workers on the go, whether they are in fixed location facilities or mobile field workers on the frontline. Skedulo has enabled hundreds of organizations, including The American Red Cross, DHL, and Sunrun, to seamlessly schedule and service over 35 million appointments worldwide. The company has secured over $115 million in funding to date, led by Softbank, Microsoft's venture firm M12, Costanoa Ventures and Blackbird. For more information, please visit www.skedulo.com or follow @Skedulo on Facebook and LinkedIn.

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