

UNPLANNED WORK: THE HUMAN IMPACT OF AN ALWAYS-ON WORLD

Global Survey Reveals How Automation Mitigates the Impacts of Unplanned Work

September
2019



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Introduction

This research survey was administered globally, with participants from Asia Pacific, Europe, and North America. A total of 509 participants responsible for technology issue resolution completed the survey about their company's practices and challenges when mitigating technology issues. Individuals surveyed included executives, managers, and front-line responders. The survey sought to understand the effects of the real-time, unplanned work that results from major technology problems. Specifically, the survey examined how unplanned work impacts digital operations across a number of business health factors, such as productivity, innovation, customer experience, and employee well-being and retention.

Executive Summary

Today, many companies are adopting digital transformation for several reasons, including adapting to the frequently changing needs of customers, improving operational efficiency, and increasing profits. However, the research reveals that organizations are facing simultaneous challenges, such as rising operational complexity and growing skills gaps, which make it harder to deliver on the promise of digital transformation. Technology disruptions also occur frequently, with nearly half of companies sharing that they experience at least one major technology issue each month.

These disruptions necessitate real-time action, which requires employees to immediately respond by jumping into fire-drill mode. As a result, major technology issues often cause unplanned work that diverts resources from innovation and hurts productivity and team health. According to our survey, 64% of IT and business professionals stated that the time they spend on unplanned work accounts for more than 100 hours each year, and continues to grow. Nearly 9 out of 10 participants stated that unplanned work directly affects their companies' ability to innovate and results in unhappy customers. Furthermore, unplanned work affects not just business health, but also team well-being and culture, with more than 1 out of 3 employees considering new employment due to stress and work-life balance issues.

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Key Findings

- The Reality of Technology Issues**
 - 48% of companies experience major technology issues at least once per month
 - A majority of companies (51%) are actually finding out about customer-impacting technology issues from their customers (tickets, calls, etc.)
 - 90% of companies use little to no automation for technology issue resolution
- The True Cost of Technology Issues and Unplanned Work**
 - 64% of tech employees will lose 100 hours or more of productivity due to unplanned work this year
 - 86% state unplanned work results in less innovation
 - More than 1 in 3 employees are considering leaving their job due to unplanned work.
- Automated Issue Resolution Benefits**
 - Companies with automation have over 20% less unplanned work
 - Employees with automation experience 26% lower stress and fewer work-life balance issues
 - Automation contributes up to 20% better employee retention

For the participants of this research, the phrase “a major technology issue” is defined as a security breach, application failure, website or network outage, service slowdown, or any other issue that directly impacts the business and its ability to deliver key services.

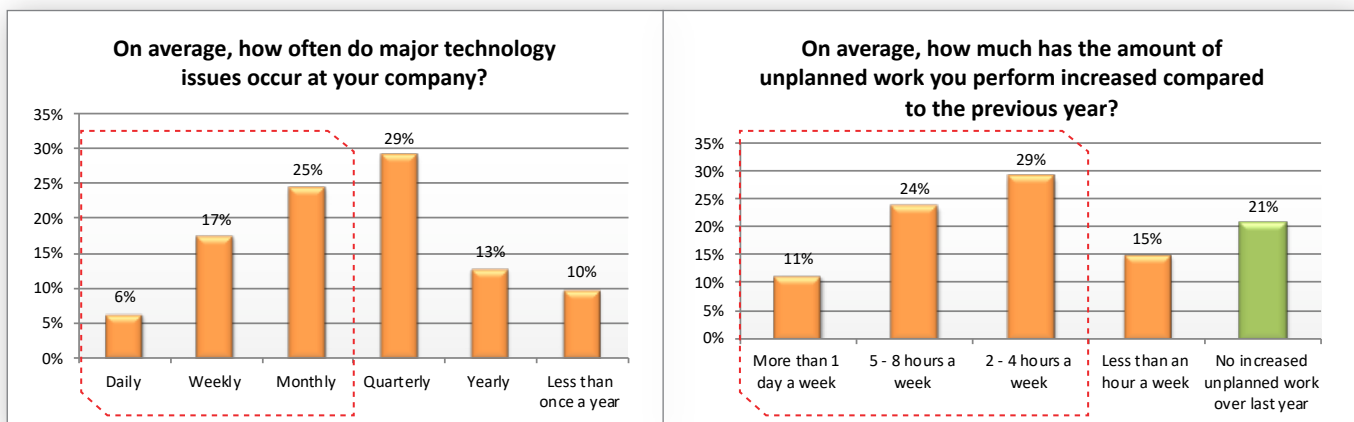
For this paper, the term “unplanned work” is often a result of a major technology issue (usually urgent and customer-impacting) that requires real-time response and resolution. Unplanned work is sudden and unexpected, involving “fire drills” that divert resources from planned work such as product development.

Detailed Findings

Major Technology Issues and Unplanned Work Are on the Rise

This research sought to understand how frequently companies experience major issues that force IT and business professionals to drop what they are doing to respond and remediate the crisis. The survey results show that nearly half of the respondents (48%) stated their companies experience major technology issues at least once per month, with nearly one quarter (23%) experiencing major issues every week.

Managing business-impacting technology issues means that resources are commonly diverted to unplanned work. In fact, 61% of respondents stated that employees are commonly required to perform unplanned work. Unplanned work redirects resources from important business tasks to issue remediation and control, and 64% of technology employees stated that the amount of unplanned work has increased by over 100 hours in comparison to last year.



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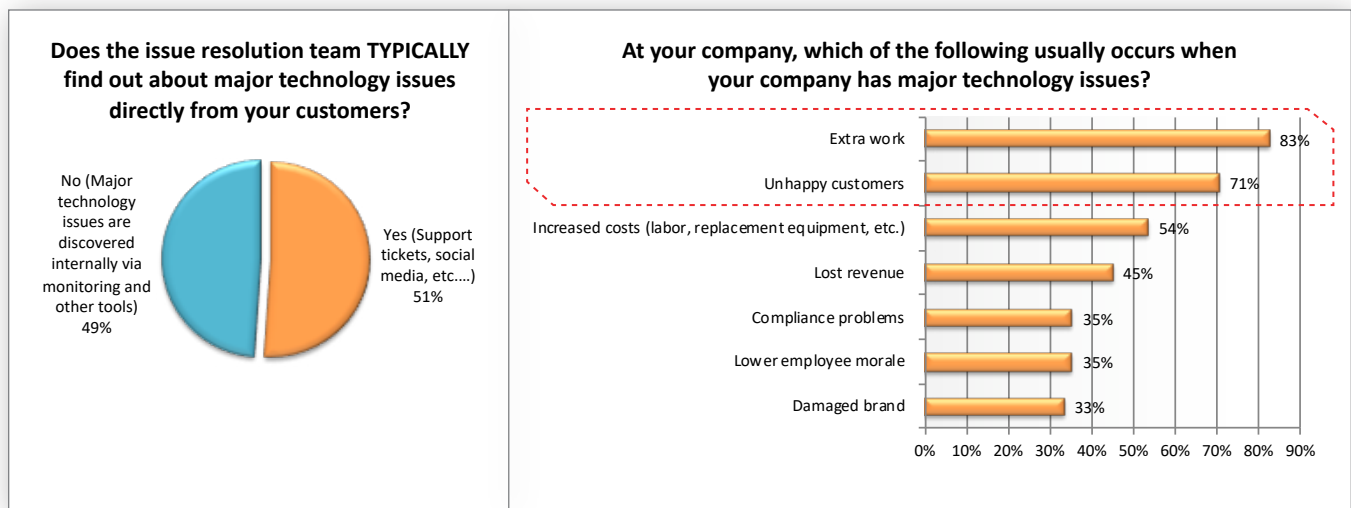
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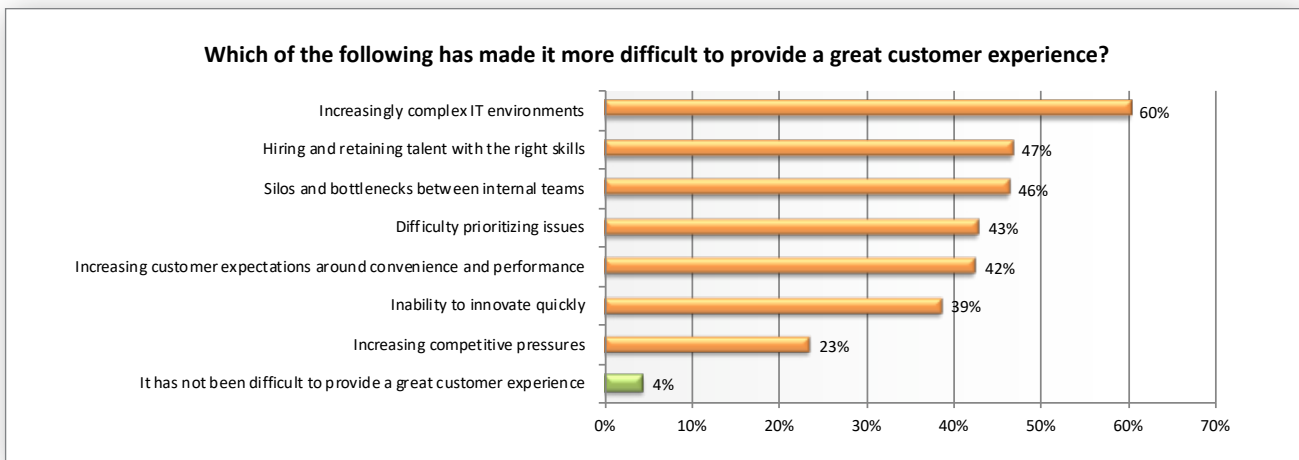
More Than Half of Companies Learn About Major Technology Issues from Customers

Over half (51%) of respondents indicated that their companies commonly find out about customer issues from the customers themselves, after the customers have already been affected. When asked about the impact of major technology issues, the top answer was extra work (83%), leading to the huge quantity of unplanned work discussed earlier. The second-highest answer was unhappy customers (71%). Several of the other answers also indicated that technology issues significantly impact the business' top-line and bottom-line, with participants citing increased costs (54%) and reduced revenue (45%).



Numerous Hurdles to Delivering Excellent Customer Service

Nearly all (96%) of companies indicate they are struggling to deliver a great customer experience. Companies are simultaneously experiencing a wide variety of challenges to delivering excellent customer service, such as increasingly complex IT systems (60%), talent and skills gaps (47%), communication silos (46%), prioritization (43%), rising customer expectations (42%), and more. Much of this is creating a Catch-22 dilemma where companies are adopting new technologies to deliver a better customer experience, but an ever-growing IT complexity increases the risk that something may fail and then negatively impacts the customer experience.



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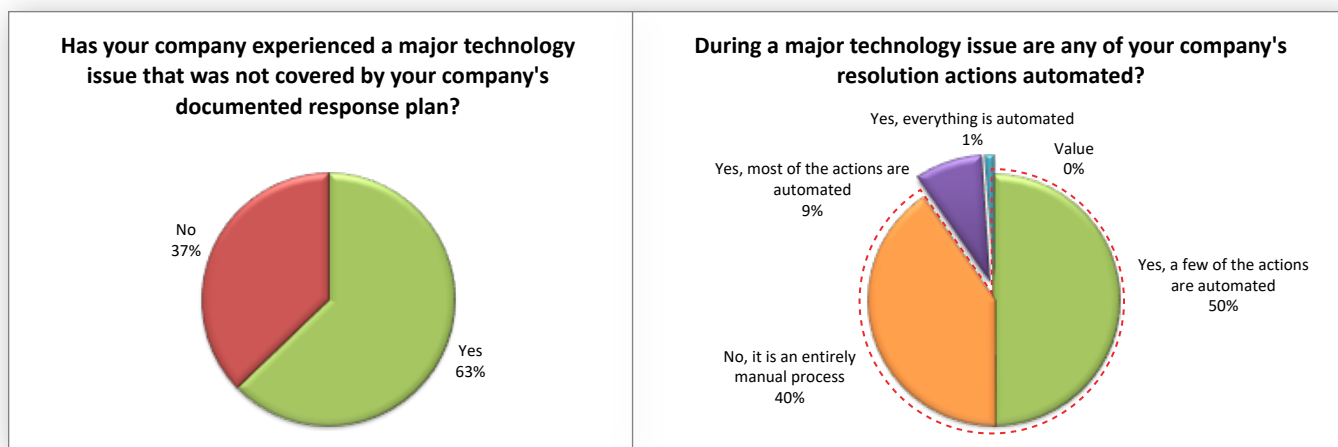
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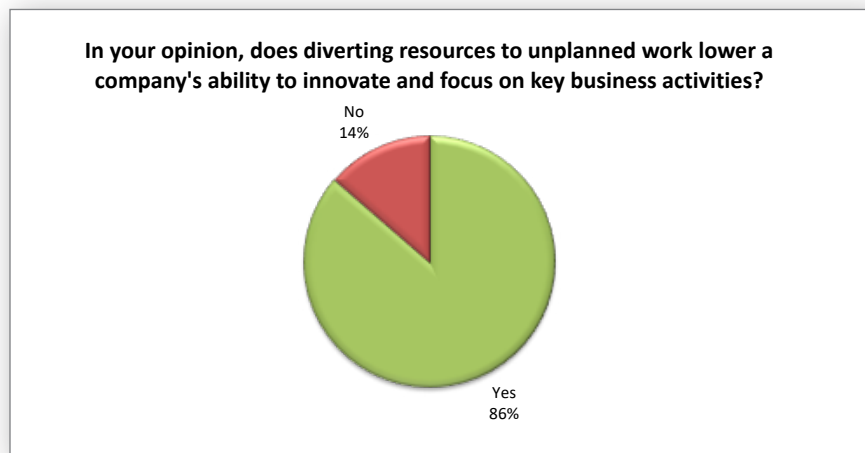
Companies Use Little or No Automation to Manage Major Technology Issues

To respond to and resolve major technology issues, companies indicated they typically utilize documented response plans that highlight processes to follow and resources to contact. However, 63% of respondents said that they, in practice, have experienced issues that their current response plans failed to account for. In addition, 90% of participants indicated they implement little or no automation in their incident response processes, with 40% indicating that their entire response process is manual. This is likely one of the reasons why the volume of unplanned work is growing each year—technology complexity and issues appear to be growing at a faster rate than investments in response strategies and automated resolution.



Unplanned Work Significantly Hurts Innovation and Employee Health

Unplanned work redirects resources from important business tasks to issue remediation, and it's a rapidly growing problem. Earlier in this report we noted that 64% of technology employees revealed that the amount of unplanned work has increased by over 100 hours per employee in comparison to last year. This is widely seen as a detrimental trend, with 86% of those surveyed indicating that unplanned work directly results in less innovation for their company, which can impact the company's ability to differentiate from competitors, provide unique customer offerings, and, ultimately, drive increased revenue.



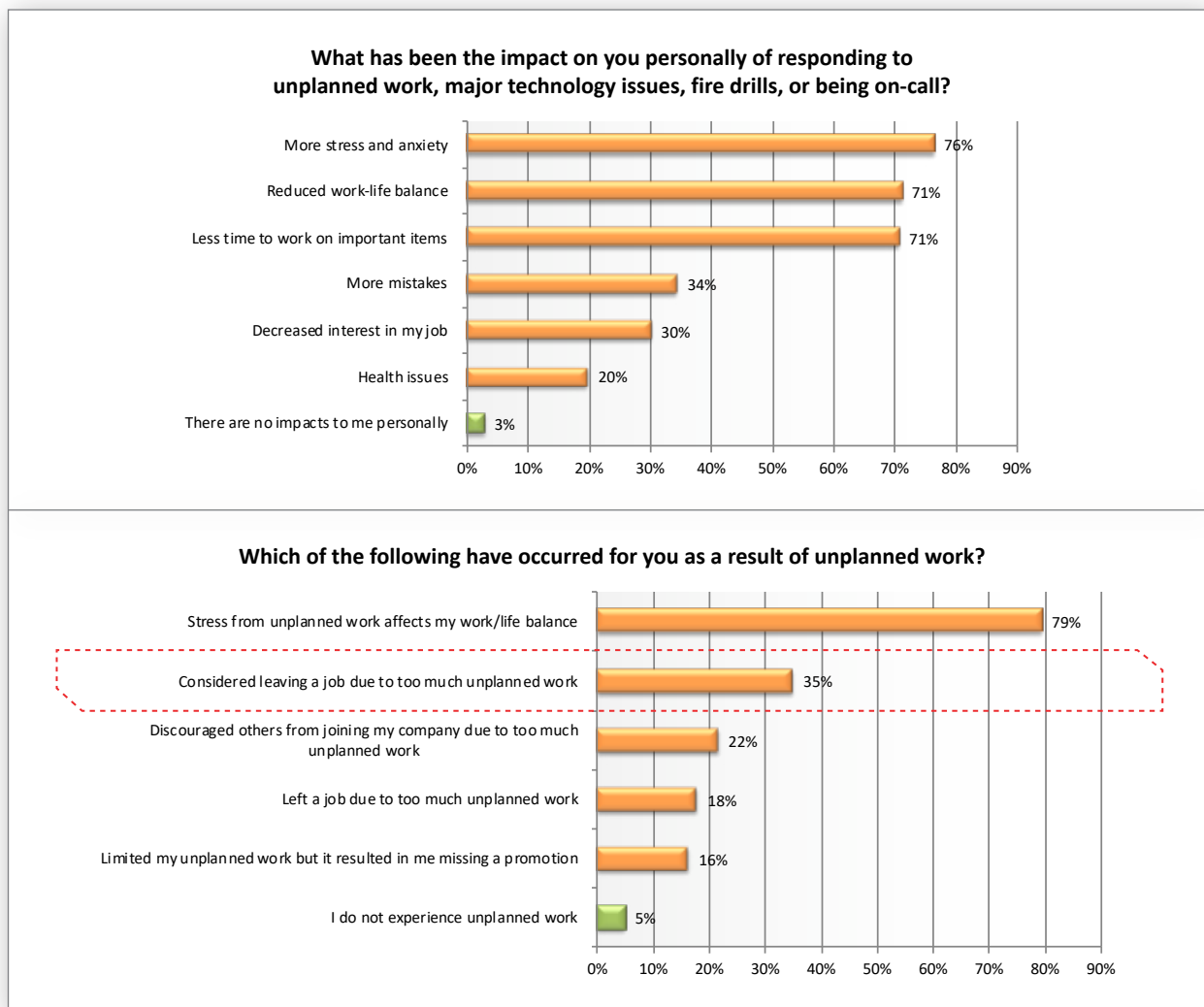
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What's more, unplanned work has another very real and negative impact—not just on the business but also on employee health and team culture. Survey respondents cited three key outcomes that resulted from responding to major technology issues: more stress and anxiety (76%), reduced work-life balance (71%), and less time to work on important items (71%). Seventy-nine percent of respondents shared that stress from unplanned work directly affects their personal lives. The data also reveals that these outcomes have a quantifiable impact on a company's ability to retain employees and attract future talent. More than 1 in 3 employees (35%) have considered leaving their job due to unplanned work, and approximately 1 out of 5 employees have actively discouraged others from working at their company due to too much unplanned work.



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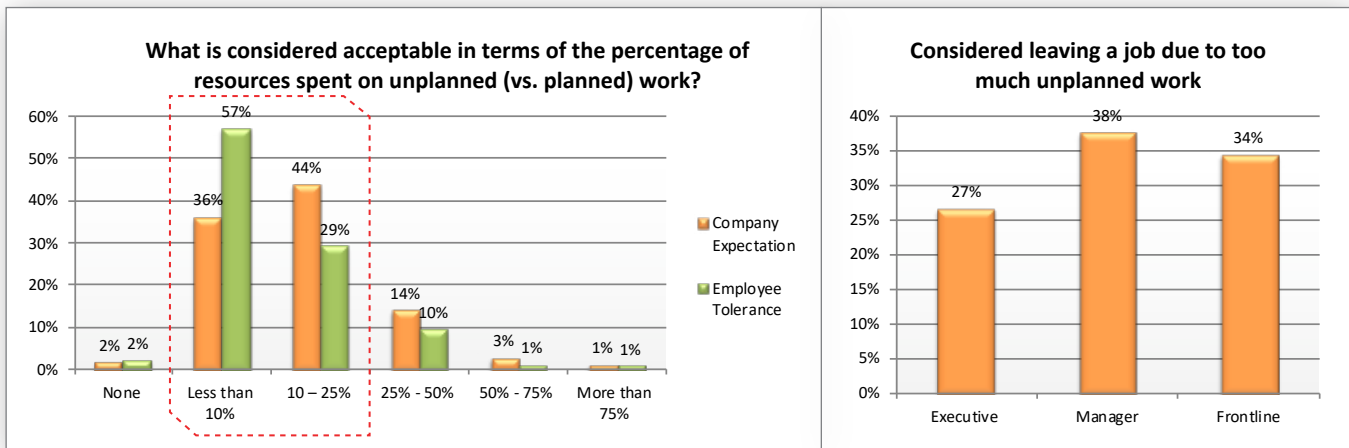
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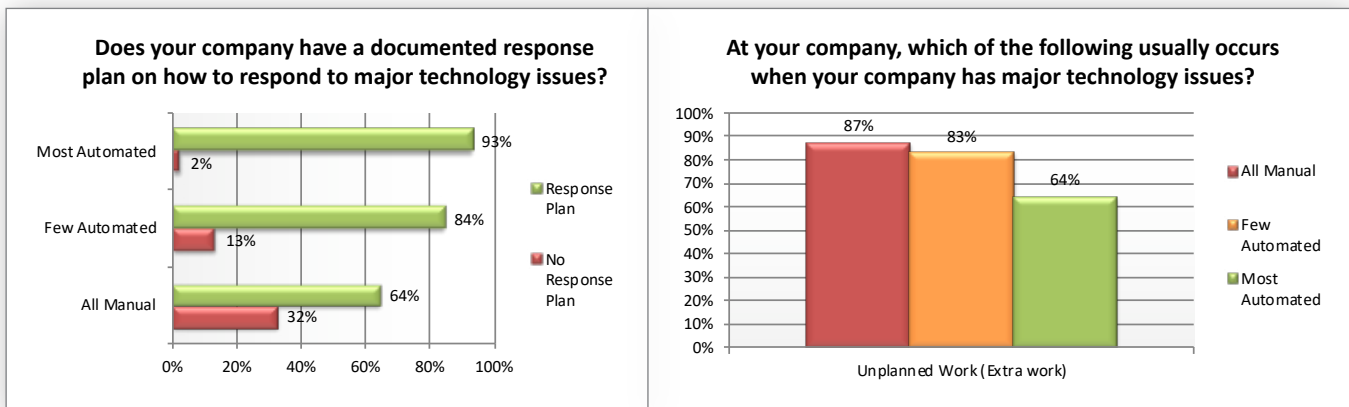
Companies Risk Employee Turnover Due to Volume of Unplanned Work

But how much unplanned work is too much? Over half of survey respondents (57%) say that 10% or less of their time should be consumed by unplanned work. But the perception of what the business expects tends to be higher, at 10 – 25%, as selected by 44% of survey participants. This shows a clear disconnect between business expectations and the environment employees are comfortable working in. While the discrepancies appear small, the impact on employee health and well-being is significant. In fact, 38% of managers and 34% of frontline employees are willing to leave their jobs due to the amount of unplanned work. But it is not isolated to just managers and employees; more than a quarter of executives (27%) also indicated that unplanned work has them thinking about other employment options.



Automation Alleviates Challenges to Managing Unplanned Work

The research data was further analyzed to discover habits and patterns that lead to solutions which address numerous technology issues, growing volumes of unplanned work, affected customers, reduced innovation, and unhappy employees. The findings show a strong correlation between reduction of unplanned work, and companies that demonstrate preparedness with automation and documented, repeatable response plans. Ninety-two percent of companies that are mostly automated also have response plans in place, but only 64% of companies that use an all-manual response approach have a response plan, indicating that they likely respond to issues on an ad hoc basis. For organizations that are mostly automated, the actual amount of unplanned work is reduced by over 20%.



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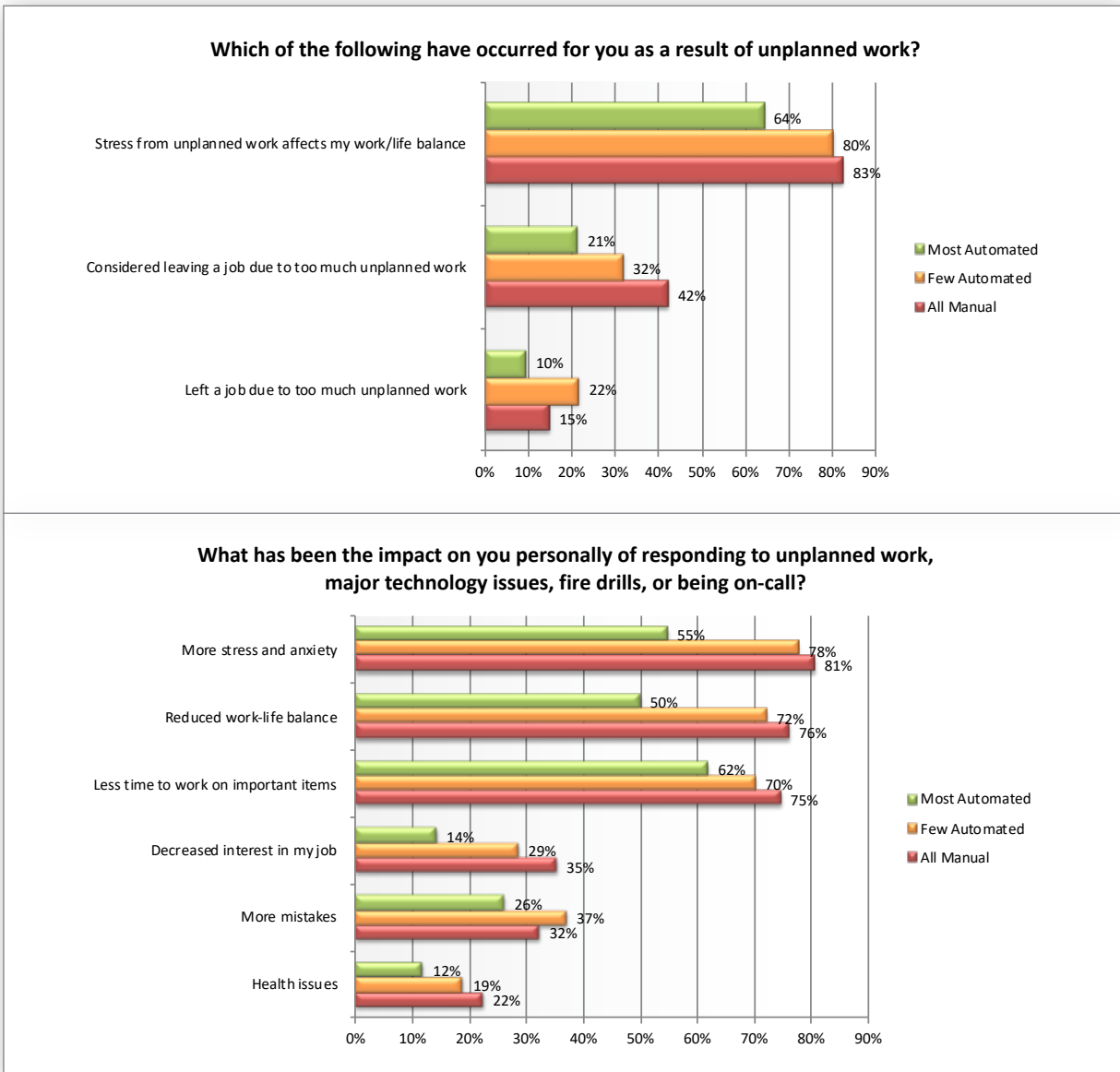
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Automation Reduces Stress, Improving Retention and Job Satisfaction

While it is often common knowledge that automation benefits the business, this report provides direct evidence that the value of automation is keenly felt by the employees. While unplanned work appears to be directly correlated with greater employee stress, automating more response processes helps to offset its impacts by helping teams realize more than a 20% reduction in employee stress. By the same margin, teams who employ more automation also state that they suffer less from reduced work-life balance. They also are 15% more interested in their jobs, suffer from health issues up to 10% less frequently, and are able to focus on more important items while making fewer mistakes. As automation directly reduces stress and improves work-life balance, employees are 20% less likely to seek other employment due to the work environment improvements that automation provides.



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Conclusion

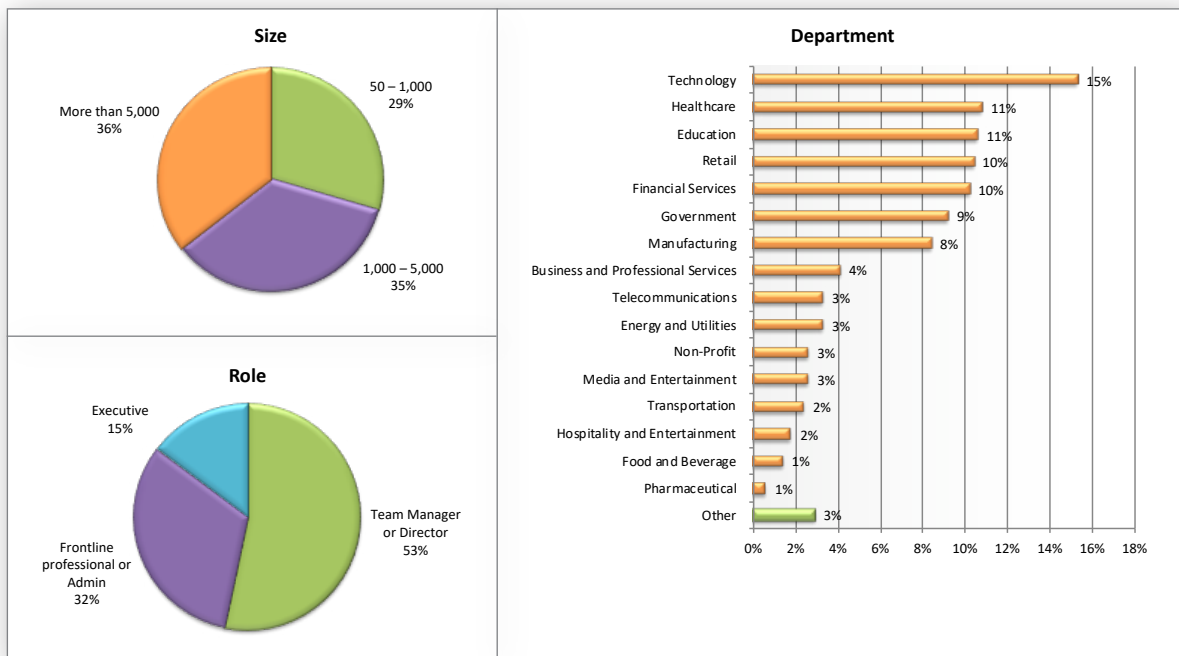
This research finds that technology disruptions occur far more frequently than expected, which directly impacts the business, customers, and employees. Companies are often too busy fighting fires to establish proper resolution and prevention processes. This lack of planning generates more unplanned work, which is growing by hundreds of hours each year. Businesses that cannot control unplanned work will experience growing top-line and bottom-line costs. Furthermore, unplanned work creates employee stress and unhealthy work environments, with more than 1/3 of respondents stating that it has caused them to consider leaving a job. This is detrimental to a company’s ability to attract and retain skilled technical talent, as well as to its long-term growth prospects. In an evolving business landscape, these critical personnel resources should instead be redirected to new innovations and business-differentiating activities.

The analysis from this research shows that automating issue resolution can help stop these trends. It facilitates planning and documented issue resolution, equipping teams with defined processes, and helping organizations become more efficient. Once implemented, automation can reduce stressful, repetitive, and administrative tasks, resulting in less unplanned work for employees. IT and business professionals have demonstrated that less unplanned work results in happier and healthier teams, who have more time for innovation.

Survey Methodology

IT and business professionals that were responsible for planning, responding, or resolving major technology issues were invited to participate in a survey on major technology issues. A total of 509 participants completed the survey on their company’s practices and the challenges of responding to technology issues. Additionally, the research sought to understand the technology impact to the business and its customers.

The survey was administered electronically, and participants were offered a token compensation for their participation. Participants were from Asia Pacific, Europe and North America.



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Dimensional Research provides practical marketing research to help technology companies make their customers more successful. Our researchers are experts in the people, processes, and technology of corporate IT and understand how IT organizations operate. We partner with our clients to deliver actionable information that reduces risks, increases customer satisfaction, and grows the business. For more information, visit www.dimensionalresearch.com.

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PagerDuty, Inc. (NYSE:PD) is a leader in digital operations management. PagerDuty empowers organizations of all sizes with real-time and data-driven insights to drive better business results. DevOps, ITOps, and SecOps teams use PagerDuty's award-winning platform for real-time operations to improve operations, deliver exceptional customer experiences, and accelerate innovation. Today, over 11,000 organizations across all industries have deployed PagerDuty. Notable customers include IBM, GE, Box, and American Eagle Outfitters. To learn more and try PagerDuty for free, visit www.pagerduty.com. Follow our [blog](#) and connect with us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).