Achieving Unified Communications and Digitizing Frontline Operations Through Real-Time Voice Collaboration
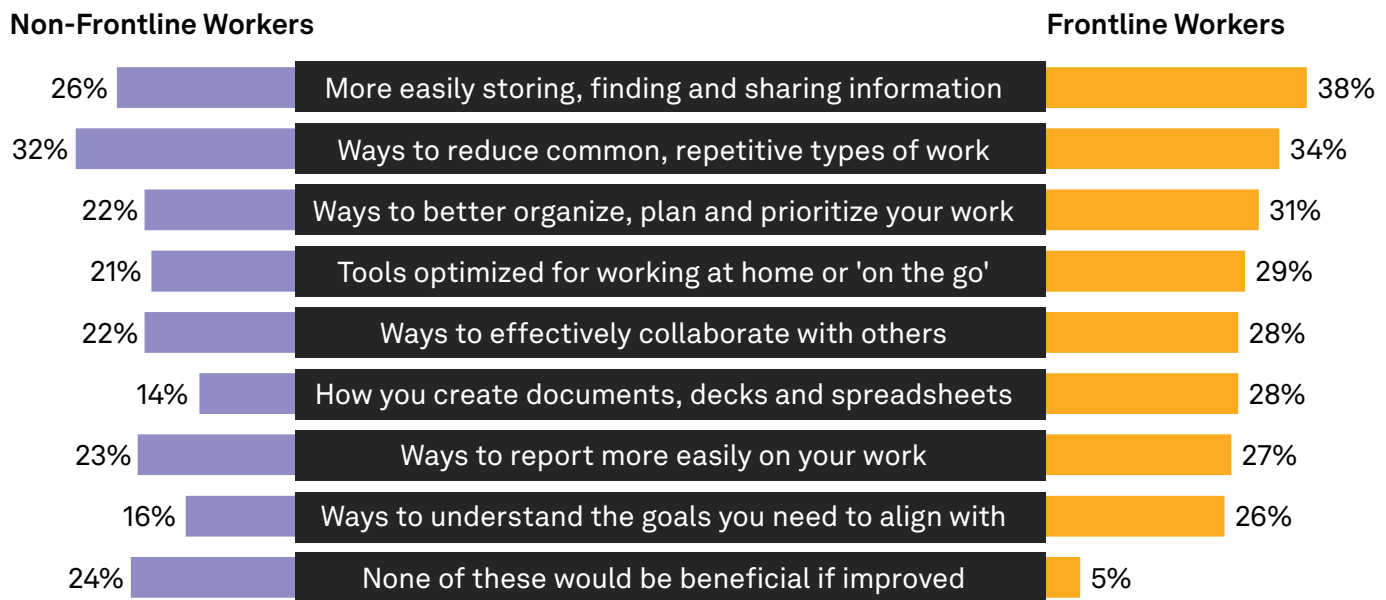
The 451 Take

Frontline workers have increasingly been in the spotlight for digital transformation and IT and business communications investments across practically all industries. This trend accelerated with the COVID-19 outbreak and is evolving beyond person-to-person (P2P) communications to comprise more complex workflows with application-to-person (A2P) communications.

Frontline workers are employees who deal directly with guests and customers, transport goods or people, provide security, or are closely involved in the production process. These workers have remained outside the scope of IT and business communications until recently. However, modern cloud-based applications for real-time P2P communications are helping organizations enable a comprehensive strategy for the digitization of frontline operations. Recent innovations include push-to-talk (PTT) 2.0 with AI-enabled capabilities such as voice user interfaces, voice bots for workflow automation and systems integration for intelligence amplification.

Key considerations for enabling frontline workers' digital experience include voice-activated interfaces and digital assistants. These capabilities can be a 'nice to have' option for desk workers; however, they are critical for many frontline workers whose work requires a 'hands-free, heads up' approach for several reasons such as productivity, safety and customer engagement. This is the case for transit drivers, security personnel, retail workers, hospitality providers, first responders (e.g., paramedics, medical technicians and firefighters), and workers in logistics and manufacturing organizations. For these workers, real-time P2P and A2P communications with a voice-first user interface is a 'must have.'

Top Worker-Identified Capabilities for Improving Productivity

Non-Frontline Workers		Frontline Workers
26%	More easily storing, finding and sharing information	38%
32%	Ways to reduce common, repetitive types of work	34%
22%	Ways to better organize, plan and prioritize your work	31%
21%	Tools optimized for working at home or 'on the go'	29%
22%	Ways to effectively collaborate with others	28%
14%	How you create documents, decks and spreadsheets	28%
23%	Ways to report more easily on your work	27%
16%	Ways to understand the goals you need to align with	26%
24%	None of these would be beneficial if improved	5%

Q: Thinking specifically about the tools and technologies you use to get your work done, which of the following, if improved, would most benefit your individual performance? Please select all that apply.

Base: All respondents (n = 491)

Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Work Execution Goals & Challenges 2021

Bringing these capabilities together will result in significant near- and long-term productivity gains. According to 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise (VotE): Workforce Productivity & Collaboration (WPC), Technology Evaluations 2021 survey, the top areas that will significantly improve workforce productivity include more easily storing, finding and sharing information, and reducing repetitive tasks with workflow automation. As shown in the figure above, these factors are particularly relevant for frontline workers.

Business Impact

– **More efficient delivery of goods and services.** The digitization of frontline operations is emerging as a key priority. Enabling the frontline workforce will have a massive impact for organizations looking to adapt and remain competitive. Organizations face mounting pressure to respond in an agile manner to a rapidly evolving business environment; frontline workers are the 'last mile,' and their performance is critical for efficient delivery of goods and services.

– **Better customer service.** Frontline workers require real-time access to information as they do their jobs. This includes a wide range of use cases such as accessing delivery status updates, checking product inventory, looking up product specifications or consulting subject matter experts without having to leave the customer.

– **Improved productivity and safety.** According to 451 Research's VotE: WPC, Technology Evaluations 2021 survey, voice-activated interfaces and digital assistants are among the top disruptive technologies that organizations are looking to adopt. Voice-first collaboration is particularly relevant for enabling frontline workers, given their need to keep their eyes up for productivity, customer engagement and safety.

– **Competitive advantage.** To achieve comprehensive digital transformation of their frontline operations, organizations will benefit from real-time A2P communications and workflow automation integrations to back-end business systems, third-party services, sensors and devices, as well as P2P and A2P communications enabled with voice-activated AI bots. This in turn will result in significant near- and long-term productivity and efficiency gains, and competitive advantage across nearly all industries.

Looking Ahead

PTT 2.0 delivers enhanced real-time communications with all the advanced capabilities in modern communications and collaboration systems afforded by cloud computing – including artificial intelligence-enabled speech recognition and real-time translation; end-to-end encryption (E2EE); and cloud-managed connectivity over LTE, private LTE and Wi-Fi.

PTT 2.0 can bring these capabilities together to deliver voice-enabled, real-time P2P communications and A2P-enabled workflow automation and intelligence amplification for the frontline workforce. All of this will help organizations digitize their frontline operations, allowing frontline workers to improve productivity, respond quicker and more accurately in critical situations, and better serve and satisfy customers and guests.

Commissioned by Orion Labs