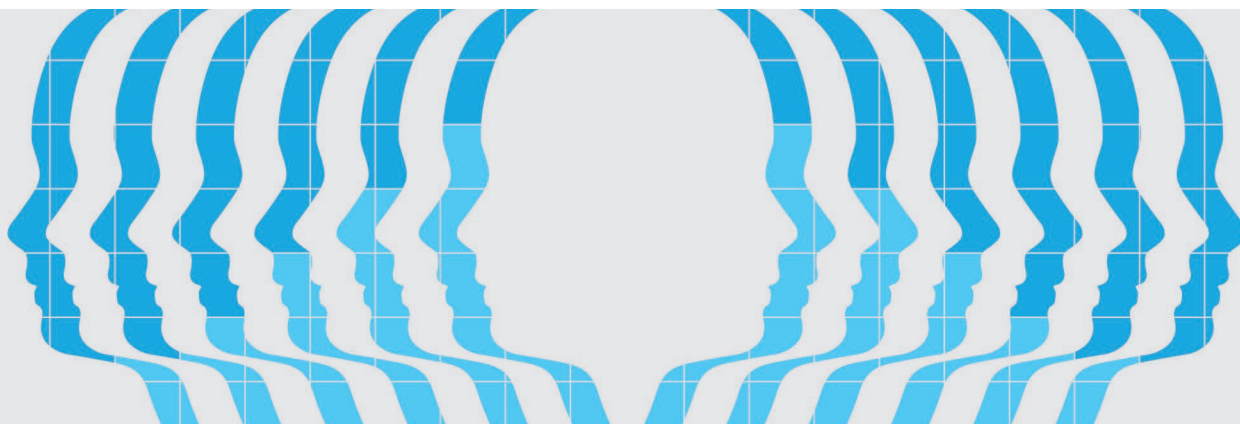


# Remote possibilities:

how conferencing technology can  
revolutionise the modern workforce

## Introduction

As a society, we have seen some momentous changes to the ways we live and work in the last few years. While some of these shifts were temporary, others have fundamentally altered the way we do things. One of the most notable of these is the significant increase in remote working. Although many people chose to work outside the office before 2020, it was only the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns which made this a widespread practice.



Despite remote working no longer being a strict requirement, the way we work and collaborate has changed forever and many of us work away from the office at least some of the time. Whereas working from home or elsewhere was once a perk, it is now offered widely or even required by many companies.

One of the inevitable consequences from this shift has been the huge and sudden uptake in the software and hardware required to enable workers to join calls and collaborate effectively without being in the same room or building.

However, unlike the early days of remote working — or the start of the pandemic when a ‘make do’ attitude was forgivable — there is now no excuse for using poor or unsuitable technology to facilitate the way we work both inside, and outside the office. The software and hardware we use to communicate and collaborate must be fit for purpose, creating a seamless experience, free of frozen screens or patchy audio.

Despite the expectation for efficiency and the fact that the technology exists to enable it, workers are still regularly experiencing issues with the technology they use to participate in conference calls. Not only can this make remote working a frustrating experience for everyone involved, it can even be damaging to working relationships, which often rely on smooth communications and effective collaboration.

For brands developing products in this space, there is a huge opportunity to stand out from the crowd, to solve common remote working bugbears and provide a superior offering that integrates with the tools and platforms that users are already comfortable with.

Creating this ‘golden ticket’ technology and enabling a smooth remote working experience will be beneficial to all parties: the brands wanting to operate in a thriving competitive market; the companies needing their employees to stay motivated and connected; and the employees themselves, who simply want to be able to work without limitation, frustration or interruption.

## The current state of play

Against this landscape of evolving priorities and new ways of working, we decided at XMOS to take the temperature of 2,000 British and American workers to explore their experience of conferencing technology. The survey examined respondents' sentiments towards the performance of tools currently used, and general attitudes towards them.

This report delves into the results of this research and uncovers the issues and views shaping the future of the collaboration market, as well as the lessons that brands in this sector need to take on board.

There was a time when the phone was central to communications, whether personal or business-focused. But with 82% of office workers in the UK and the US now saying they join conference calls on a weekly basis, it is clear that the way we work has shifted from expensive add on conference bridges to sophisticated, built-in technology which allows for easy and fast collaborative working.

Not only are we joining these types of calls regularly, we are also spending a significant amount of our week on them. In fact, nearly a third (32%) of office workers say they spend up 1-2 hours a week on conference calls, a fifth (20%) say this equates to 3-4 hours a week, and over a fifth (21%) say they spend over five hours a week. With so much time spent working in this hybrid way, the need for effective communications tools has never been greater.



This shift to collaborative working is now more than just a matter of convenience, too. With the vast majority (82%) of UK and US office workers agreeing that it is important for them to join calls and collaborate virtually to do their job properly, it is clear that video-based and interactive conferencing tools now play a vital role in the way we work.

With this shift also comes a change in the way we refer to our working status. Phrases such as 'office hours' or 'out of office' are now becoming obsolete as the idea of a physical office becomes less and less relevant. Similarly, the concept of the working day has also changed, if not disappeared, with flexible working policies meaning that the 9-5 no longer exists for many.

Another factor hastening this change is the array of technology modern workers now have at their fingertips. The traditional telephone call is increasingly becoming a thing of the past, as 59% of office workers join calls from laptops, and 30% use a tablet.

It's not just how people join calls that has changed, but where they are connecting from as well.



60%

Although nearly two thirds of us still join conference calls from our company office



56%

over half join from a home office



22%

say they have joined from their bed



20%

have joined from a café

It is not just workers who are ringing the changes when it comes to conference calls and how they are conducted. Companies are also realising the benefits of the technology available, and almost half (41%) are asking their employees to adopt specific conferencing software as part of their ongoing routine. Almost two thirds (61%) are asked to use Microsoft Teams to conduct conference calls, and just over half (55%) are asked to use Zoom.

Companies continue to mandate which tools their employees use, with just 14% of UK workers saying they are free to choose their own conferencing software, and 18% saying they can choose their own hardware. For employers, it makes sense to direct their employees to use certain tools, aligning the hardware and software used across a whole host of activities, from conference calls to sharing documents and communications channels.

## It's not just software

Over a quarter (28%) of workers are being guided towards specific conferencing hardware by their employers. Of those employers that are mandating hardware:



55%

Over half of workers are asked to use specific headsets



44%

are required to use company issued laptops



40%

stated that the use of specific microphones was mandated



27%

highlighted that they were instructed to use certain speakerphones

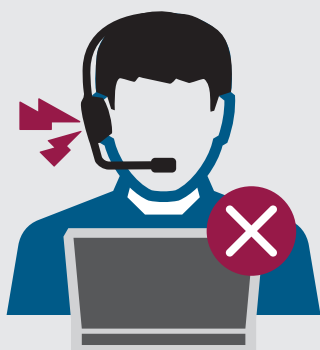
While they may not have a say in choosing which technology tools are used, it is crucial that employees are comfortable using them. The research shows that this is not always the case, as less than half (41%) of workers say they are happy with their current conferencing software and hardware. With remote working now the rule for many, it has never been more important for these technologies to work in harmony with one another to make the user experience as smooth as possible.

These findings highlight a genuine need for companies to use conferencing technology that works effectively and creates a seamless, stress-free remote working experience. And for brands manufacturing conferencing products, it is a timely reminder to understand the challenges workers are facing and create solutions that cater for their requirements.

# Understanding user frustrations

For users, having ineffective, faulty or poor-quality conferencing set ups can severely impact not only the experience of individual calls and meetings, but also cause frustration that spills over into their whole working life.

Our research shows that over three quarters (78%) of UK and US office workers say they regularly experience issues with their conferencing set up



## 27%

Over a quarter experience issues with their conferencing set up on a monthly basis



## 25%

For a quarter of employees, the problem is even more severe, with issues occurring at least once a week



## 22%

More than a fifth say they have issues on a daily basis

In terms of the nature of these frustrations, the problems are varied. Being able to hear clearly is one of the biggest priorities for remote workers, with nearly two thirds (63%) citing this as the most important aspect of any conferencing call. In spite of this, audio issues appear to be a consistent challenge for workers, according to the research.

Audio problems exist in a number of forms, with two fifths (42%) complaining they have experienced no sound on calls, a further 50% encountering annoying echoes, and over half (51%) saying their calls are affected by delayed sound. A further 48% say volume issues are a problem, 52% experience distracting background noise and 48% claim their audio does not sync with their video.

Half of UK and US office workers say they have experienced poor quality audio in the last 12 months, highlighting the severity of the issue.



In addition to audio problems, workers also reported a number of other frustrating issues slowing down or interrupting their ability to join conference calls and collaborate virtually. A common complaint is distractions during the call or catch up, with over a quarter (28%) saying they have experienced pets or children interrupting these meetings by appearing in the background.

Technology errors and difficulty navigating the logistics of joining or participating in calls also cause irritation for employees. Over a fifth (21%) say they have been frustrated by having to update security settings just before a call, and a further 21% admit to having trouble sharing their screen.



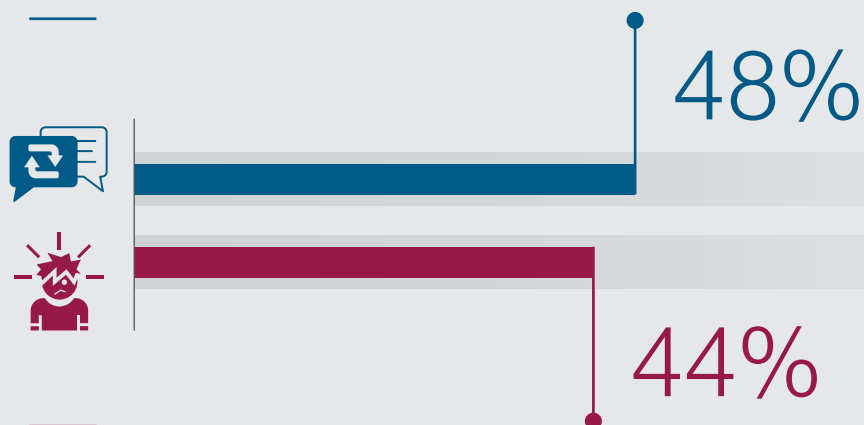
Further problems reported by workers include video-based issues, such as not knowing if a colleague is paying attention (25%) during a call, the camera not syncing with other technology (21%) and perhaps embarrassingly, not being able to remove a filter from their face (14%).

The impact of these issues is widespread, exceeding just simple annoyance. Over one in eight workers (13%) said they got so frustrated with their conferencing solution that they broke something in anger, and 14% said they stopped using the technology altogether!

And the consequences reach far beyond the parameters of the calls themselves, with some workers' wider careers being impacted. The mute button has tripped up 21% of workers, who have admitted to saying something they should not have, thinking they were on mute. A further 12% said they had accidentally shared sensitive information due to their conferencing technology not working properly, and 14% have even been reprimanded as a result by their superiors.

## Confidence in conferencing products and tools is being affected.

Nearly half of all respondents believe that having to ask people to repeat themselves due to poor audio makes them and their company look unprofessional.



More than two-fifths say that it is annoying that the technology does not 'just work', allowing them to get on with their day frustration-free.

## A better way

It is clear that the current situation needs addressing. The appetite and requirement for remote working is undoubtedly there, and both employers and employees are on board in terms of facilitating a 'work from anywhere' model. Yet the technology needed to make this happen evidently needs work.

And it is down to product manufacturers in the conferencing technology space to listen to these user frustrations and address these with solutions which perform more appropriately, efficiently and consistently.

At XMOS, we believe the answer to the audio problems that cause the majority of user frustrations lies in giving equipment manufacturers exactly what they need to insert high quality audio into their conferencing applications and build better solutions – at speed.

Our new XVF3800 voice processor has been designed to deliver the high performance levels that are so clearly needed by employees and businesses alike. The four-microphone processor can also facilitate Microsoft Teams and Zoom certification in conferencing devices, video bars, portable speakerphones, PCs, gaming monitors and collaborative display solutions.



State of the art algorithms provide high-quality audio in challenging environments, and the flexibility built into the XVF3800 allows design engineers to optimise the acoustic performance of their products. Specific features include acoustic echo cancellation, noise suppression to block out background sound and accurate voice capture technology, all of which directly address the issues cited by workers in our research.

Product designers now have the opportunity to incorporate this new technology into their collaboration tools. By doing so, not only will they be adapting to a modern workforce which has more disparate and flexible work environments than ever before – and higher expectations to match – but they will also be gaining a vital competitive advantage.

To find out more about the XVF3800, visit:  
<https://www.xmos.ai/xvf3800>



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REPORT

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[www.xmos.ai](http://www.xmos.ai)  
[sales@xmos.com](mailto:sales@xmos.com)