

WHITE PAPER

# The Role of Unified Communications and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace

Meeting Businesses' Goals with Lumen and Webex by Cisco

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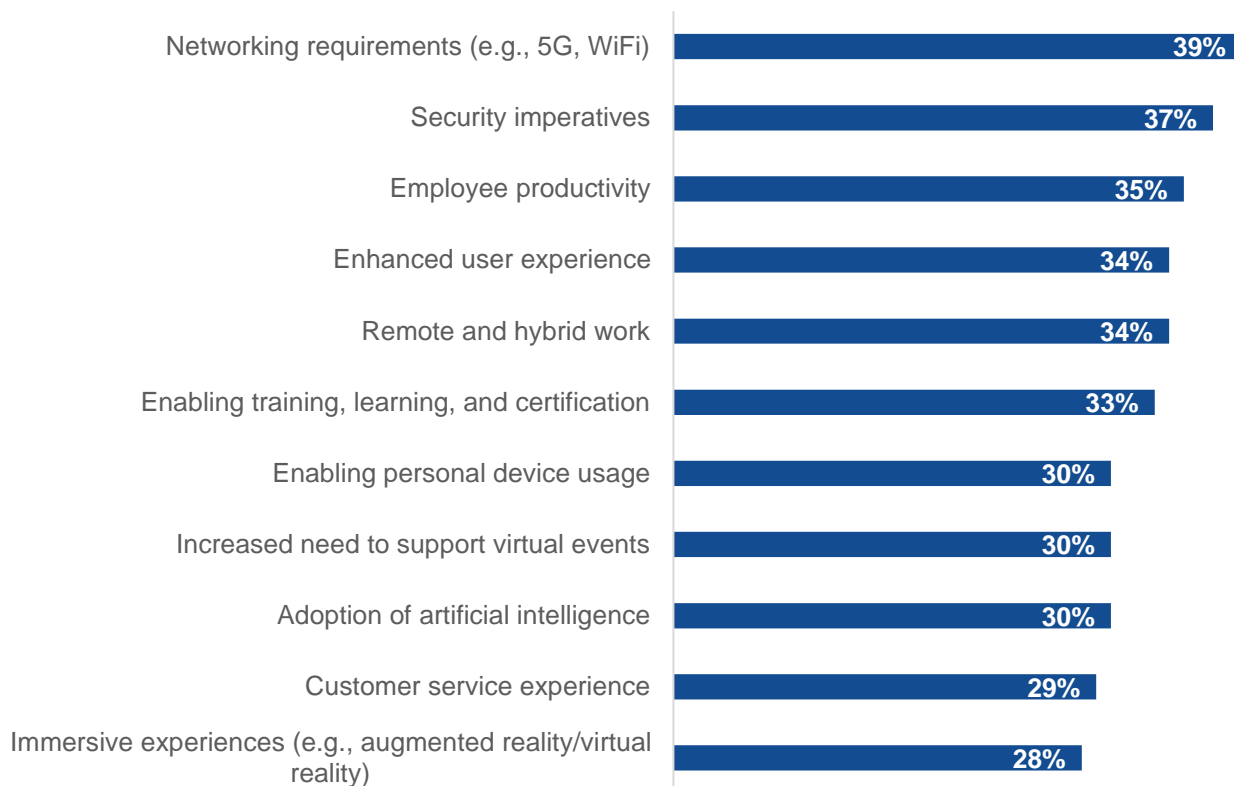
## The Evolving Workplace

Today’s workplace has shifted from a tangible space to a concept that can be, for many employees, anywhere. Around the world, organizations are implementing their return-to-office strategies, and though some require all employees to return to the office full-time and some committed to a 100% remote work strategy, other organizations have opted for a mixed or hybrid approach that supports users from wherever they happen to be working—at home or from the office—basically wherever work needs to be done.

This shift is having a dramatic effect on all facets of IT, especially end-user computing (EUC) and unified communications and collaboration (UC&C). In fact, in a recent research study by TechTarget’s Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG), remote and hybrid work was among the top five most cited business dynamics that organizations said has a significant influence on their UC&C strategies, after networking, security, employee productivity, and user experience (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1.** Security, Employee Productivity, User Experience, and Remote/Hybrid Work Factor Heavily into UC&C Decision Making

**Which of the following business dynamics are having a significant impact on your organization’s UC&C strategy? (Percent of respondents, N=378, multiple responses accepted)**



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, [End-user Computing Trends](#), February 2022.

Focusing solely on the hybrid workforce, 26% of respondents also noted that accommodating meetings between remote and office workers was their number one priority for supporting their UC&C strategy, while 21% said their number one priority was supporting users working from home while increasing collaboration and employee engagement (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2.** Communication and Collaboration Strategies to Support Hybrid Workforce

**In terms of improving your organization’s communication and collaboration strategy to better support its hybrid workforce, how would you rank the importance of the following priorities? (Percent of respondents, N=336,**



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

## The Evolution of the Hybrid Workplace

Today’s hybrid workplace owes a debt of gratitude to the groundwork laid by decades of remote access and collaboration solutions. In the 1990s, remote work referred to clunky laptops and dial-up connections to the office before evolving to internet-based VPNs and remote desktop technologies. Even as the technology matured, the early use case offered limited capabilities in terms of collaboration, so the main users were often in the field (e.g., sales representatives).

Technology continued to advance, and as consistent, high-speed internet became ubiquitous, the remote experience evolved with it, supporting better graphics, more peripherals, and increased collaboration capabilities. By the mid-2010s, the user experience had advanced to the point where users could be productive from anywhere, and organizations could fill roles with talented employees without having to relocate them. As remote work was embraced, so, too, was the concept of hybrid work, where users could work from home occasionally as a perk or to remain productive in situations that would have otherwise required time off. Still, the lion’s share of users remained in the office.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Unified Communication and Collaboration Integrations for Modern Business Workflows*, to be published.

By 2020, technology had advanced far enough that it allowed users to remain productive and collaborative anywhere. This was adopted widely during the pandemic, as even the most traditional organizations needed a way to maintain productivity and collaboration while meeting business objectives. For many organizations, this accelerated modernization, which would ordinarily take years to achieve, was completed in just a few months.

This rapid pivot from office-based work to remote work was well-received by employees, who embraced the new work/life balance that comes with a relaxed schedule and no need for a commute. While some users prefer to work from the office, others are perfectly content to work from home either full or part-time, leading to the hybrid workplace that we see today.

While there were many benefits of the hybrid workplace, downsides also emerged, such as isolation from coworkers (especially when some or many of those coworkers are in an office together), which can lead to a lack of collaboration and loss of company culture. In addition, there is the thought, sometimes from leadership, that it would be easier to achieve business objectives (such as work goals or customer satisfaction) if employees returned to the office full time.

Fortunately, these downsides can be remedied with technology solutions that help organizations implement a structured approach that encourages organization-wide hybrid work while maintaining productivity and collaboration to create a new corporate culture inclusive of all workers, at home or remote.

## Prioritizing UC&C Is Necessary to Ensure a Successful and Satisfied Hybrid Workforce

Today's technologies have evolved to the point where IT organizations can support users in a hybrid way without limiting employee productivity or satisfaction but while still maintaining business objectives, providing the best of both worlds. Plenty of attention has been paid to EUC in the past few years. The concepts associated with EUC (devices, management, security, identity, and more) are the very things that are required to connect users to the applications and data they need to work and are core components of a hybrid workforce. But to be truly successful, organizations also need to prioritize UC&C initiatives that **connect employees to each other and to customers**. A hybrid work environment built upon a robust, well-designed UC&C foundation that focuses on end-user experience and collaboration can help organizations:

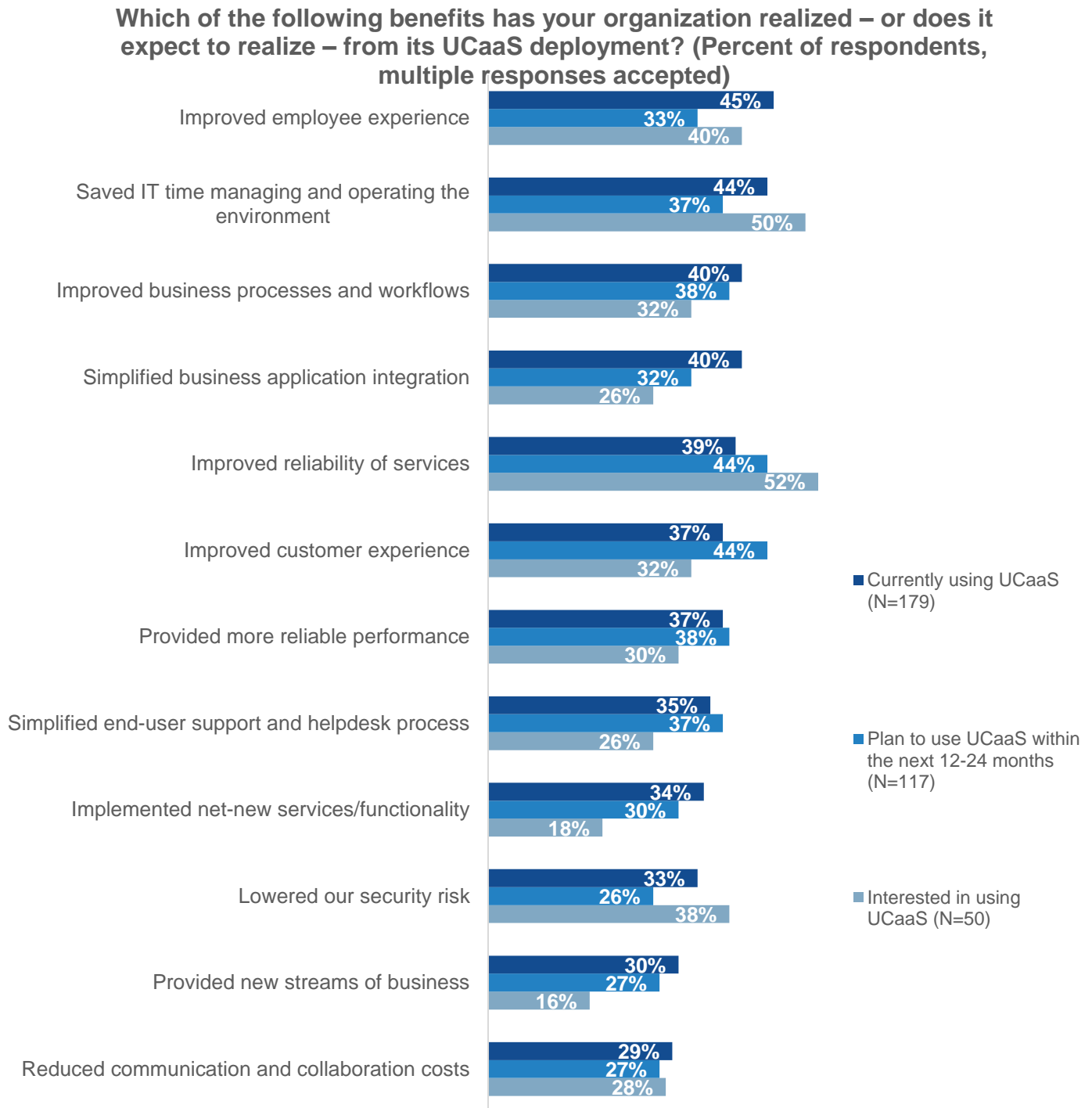
- Ensure employee collaboration and reduce isolation.
- Meet and exceed overall business objectives.
- Attract and retain talent.
- Encourage diversity and inclusion.
- Contribute to corporate sustainability goals.
- Build a consistent, rewarding company culture.
- Maintain or increase customer satisfaction.
- Endure future unpredictable business disruptions.
- Scale back the required facilities to support users, reducing the overall cost.

In fact, Enterprise Strategy Group research shows that organizations are either realizing many of these benefits today or expecting to realize them in the next 12-24 months (see Figure 3).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Unified Communication and Collaboration Integrations for Modern Business Workflows*, to be published.

**Figure 3. Benefits of Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS)**



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

It is clear that designing, implementing, and maintaining a UC&C strategy is a challenging task, perhaps an even more daunting task if several solutions require integration. Organizations must look for partners and solutions that can be integrated across the enterprise, and that's where Webex and Lumen come in. With a partnership spanning over 25 years, Lumen and Cisco have solidified their standing in the marketplace as leaders in the UC&C space. Together, Lumen and Cisco deliver a comprehensive set of UC&C solutions for organizations to implement and create a thriving hybrid workplace.

## Why Webex Fits the Bill

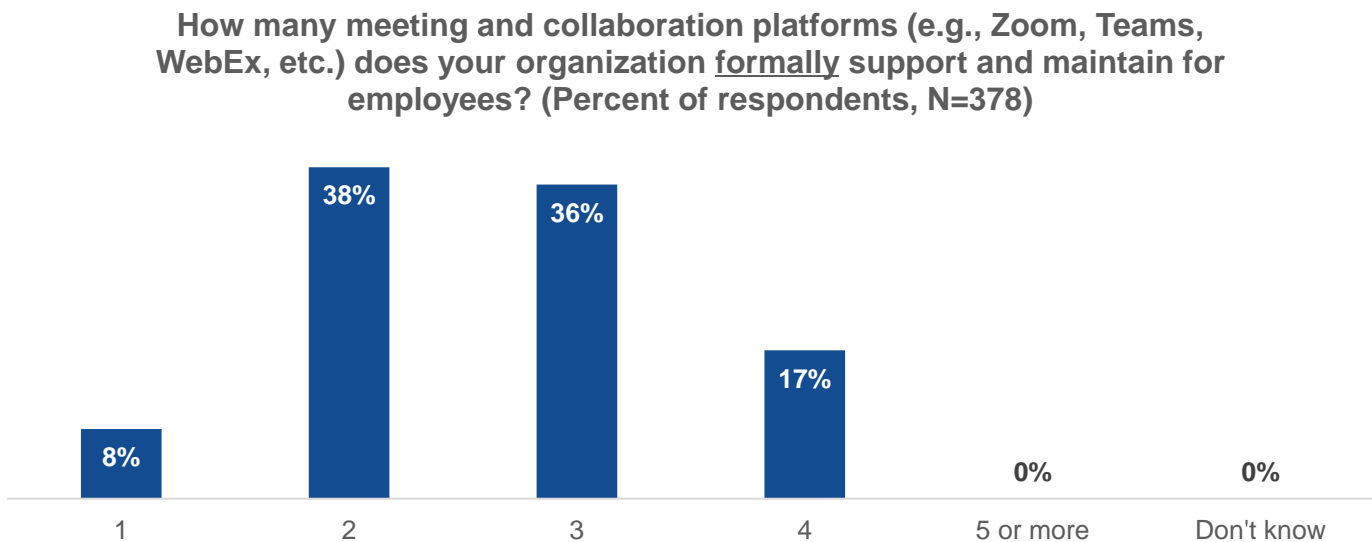
When people outside of UC&C hear Webex, they think of web-based meetings, but Webex is much more than meetings. This is something Lumen understands. Lumen has created a set of comprehensive collaboration solutions around the Webex product. Their solutions, Lumen Solutions for Webex and Lumen Solutions for Webex Calling, can provide a seamless integration path for this powerful suite of collaboration tools across any enterprise.

Taking a step back, most organizations have already deployed one or more technologies related to unified communications and collaboration, like:

- Messaging and chat.
- Task management.
- File sharing.
- Webinars and meetings.
- Team communications.
- Calling/PSTN integration.

In some cases, companies have deployed, and must therefore pay for and support, multiple services for each of these, not to mention integrate them with existing systems or processes. Enterprise Strategy Group research showed that 91% of organizations supported multiple meeting and collaboration platforms (see Figure 4).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 4.** The Majority of Organizations Support Multiple Meeting and Collaboration Platforms



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

This bloat has effects across the board, creating an additional load on IT support resources and budgets, confusing users, and reducing the ability for teams to communicate with each other effectively, especially if they each use different platforms.

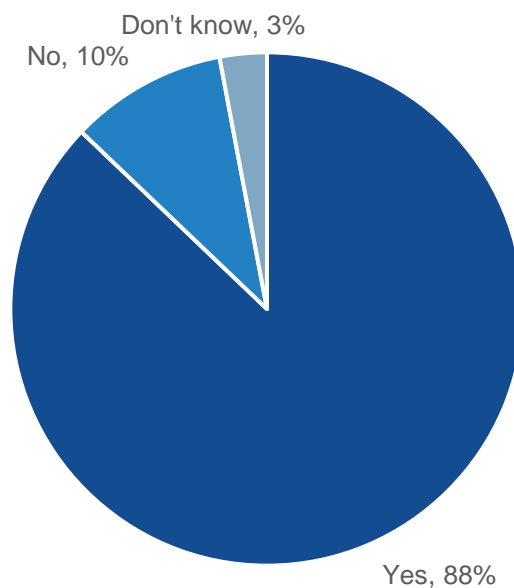
<sup>4</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, [End-user Computing Trends](#), February 2022.

## Webex Gets the Message

Webex addresses this situation by bundling calling, meetings, messaging, webinars, and more into a single UC&C suite that’s devoted to security, inclusivity, and accessibility. The appetite for an all-inclusive platform like this is real, with 88% of respondents in a recent Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG) research survey indicating that they would prefer a UC&C platform that included chat, video, virtual events, security, and more (see Figure 5).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 5. Overwhelming Preference for UC&C Platforms with Multiple Integrated Capabilities**

**Would your organization prefer a UC&C platform inclusive of integrated chat, video, virtual events, security, etc., modules? (Percent of respondents, N=378)**



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

The reasons for this, according to respondents from the same ESG research survey, were:<sup>6</sup>

- Simplified IT management (55%).
- Optimal user experience (51%).
- Improved security (50%).
- Improved employee productivity (48%).
- Simplified integration with business processes (47%).
- Lower costs (31%).

By addressing all of these, as well as adding features like real-time translation, gesture recognition, screen reader support, closed captioning, and interpreter support, Cisco has positioned Webex in a way that meets the needs of many organizations. Plus, where some platforms make customers choose between them and Microsoft Teams,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Webex enjoys tight integration with Teams, from meetings to calling, giving organizations a no-compromise solution to their UC&C needs.

With Webex, coupled with Cisco's infrastructure and security capabilities, it's easy to see why Lumen and Cisco make such a strong partnership.

## Lumen Solutions for Webex

Lumen, a Cisco Gold Integrator and Gold Provider (the replacement term for "partner" in 2023), is one of the largest telecommunication companies in the world, a position they leverage to help organizations deal with all types of communications needs, including UC&C. They manage and operate one of the largest, most connected, most deeply peered networks in the world. In fact, Lumen is the top peered global network per AS Rank.<sup>7</sup>

Lumen Solutions for Webex combines Lumen's expertise across all of telecommunications with their partnership with Webex to develop a custom-tailored UC&C strategy and platform based on individual company requirements.

### The Power Only a Gold Provider Can Bring

Most organizations have people who are responsible for phones, conferencing, collaboration, and security. In many cases, these roles are spread across multiple people or departments, instead of being handled by a dedicated team. Historically, this may have worked, but the demands of a modern, hybrid workforce have introduced more variables that make it difficult to deliver the cohesive, inclusive environment needed to ensure productivity and collaboration. To support users anywhere, from any device, today's UC&C platform must work with internet services, network access, VPNs, and cloud providers, each of which might represent a gap in coverage for an organization.

For example, research conducted by Enterprise Strategy Group concluded that security presents several challenges to organizations. Concerns about attacks on public cloud-based platforms topped the list, but customers also noted secure access for users, devices, and applications; data leakage/loss through messaging and collaboration tools; and VOIP denial of service attacks as top concerns affecting their communication and collaboration platforms (see Figure 6).<sup>8</sup>

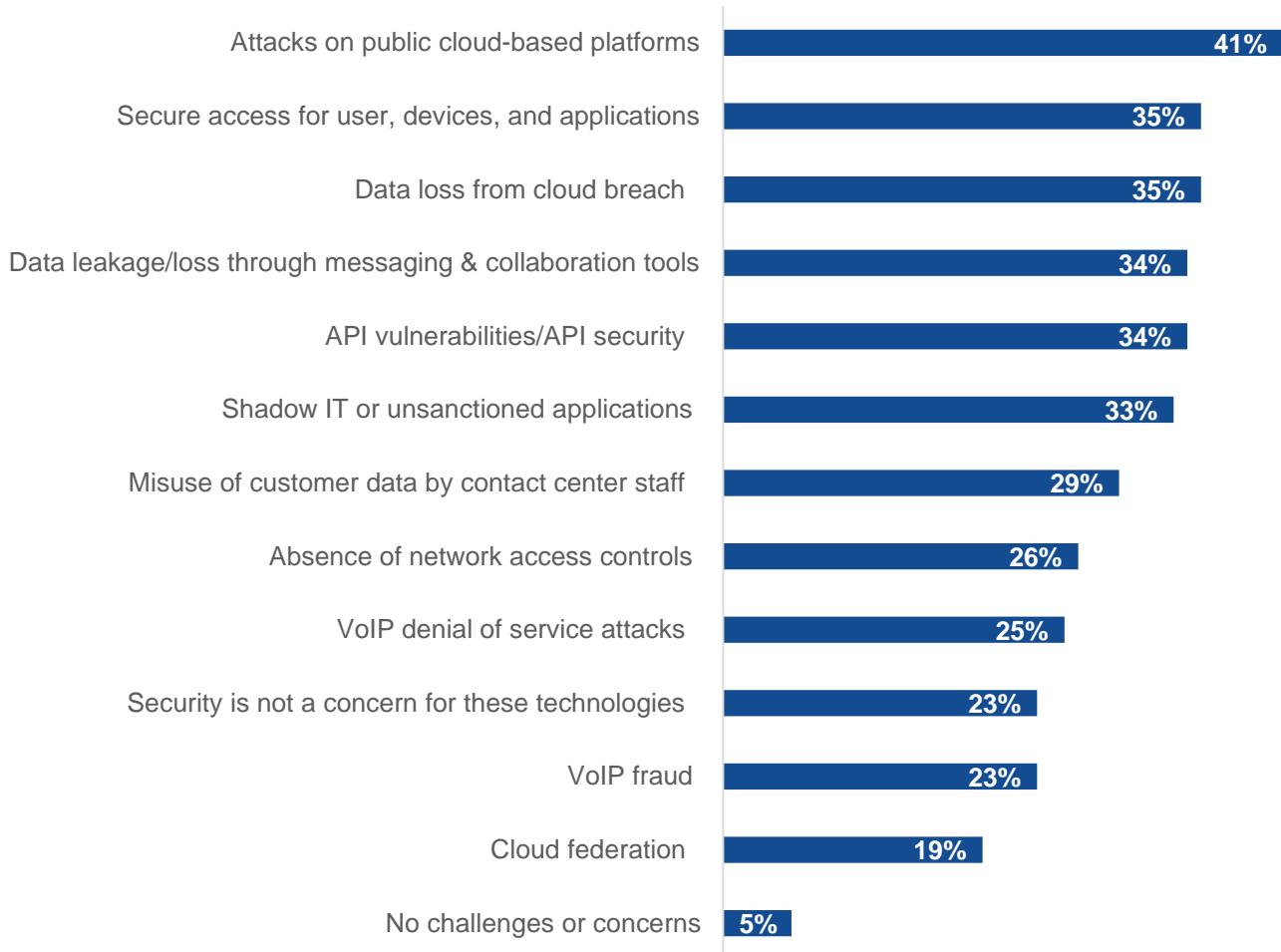
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<sup>7</sup> Source: CAIDA, [AS Rank](#), December 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Unified Communication and Collaboration Integrations for Modern Business Workflows*, to be published.

Figure 6. Security Challenges Tied to UC&C

**Generally speaking, what security challenges or concerns does your organization have related to its communication and collaboration platforms? (Percent of respondents, N=375, multiple responses accepted)**



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Lumen Solutions for Webex closes those gaps, working with existing providers, services, devices, software, and personnel to customize a UC&C strategy that is designed to **securely** meet all the needs of a modern workforce while improving user experience, collaboration, and employee satisfaction.

When an organization partners with Lumen, it is able to leverage a suite of services provided by Lumen’s Cisco-certified specialists who assist with the planning, design, implementation, and management of the organization’s overall UC&C strategy. Lumen Solutions for Webex offers enhanced support, ensuring all users and admins have been educated on the capabilities of the UC&C platform so that they can get the most out of the experience.

Post-implementation, Lumen is the first line of support and leverages its relationships and knowledge of Cisco, customers, carriers, and internet providers to help resolve issues quickly and without the conflicts that can be associated with managing multiple vendors. Organizations can also consider adding Lumen Enablement Services to their UC&C portfolio. Lumen Enablement Services offer specialized UC&C services that help customers leverage the complete ROI of their collaboration purchases and fill in gaps they may have in technical expertise or staffing resources.

## Conclusion

Today's workforce has expectations that are unique in the history of corporate work, especially as it relates to IT departments. While in the past, IT departments assigned employees the tools and software they needed to do their jobs (and if they weren't in the office, they couldn't use those tools and software effectively), today's employees are savvier, and those entering the workforce expect flexibility and agile technologies (tools) to help them succeed at work. They already know how they can best use some of the tools at their disposal, where they're most productive or creative, and how to collaborate effectively outside of a traditional office scenario. It's incumbent on leadership to understand that employees want to be productive while still working in a hybrid way, and that, even though yesterday's technology couldn't always enable that scenario, today's technology can.

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How an organization perceives this—either as an opportunity or a challenge—can have an effect on the overall business. Resisting the trend may preserve existing policies that served the company well in the past but may consequently expose it to risks from technical (security, data loss, and file sharing) and cultural (employee engagement, talent retention/acquisition, and corporate culture) perspectives today. Organizations that see the opportunity can flip the script. They have the chance to increase security, better attract talent, and improve overall employee satisfaction and productivity. This, in turn, helps create an inclusive corporate culture with improved technical parity that establishes and enables collaboration and contribution evenly, regardless of location. Finally, productive, happy, collaborative employees can have a positive effect on customer communications and experience, which helps increase revenue.

The reality is that the future of the workplace does not include a 100 percent return to the office. Hybrid work is here to stay, and a critical component in adapting to this change is a comprehensive UC&C strategy that prioritizes end-user experience and enables communication and collaboration regardless of user location or endpoint device. The good news is that this doesn't necessarily require a complete infrastructure replacement. In many cases, organizations can deploy a UC&C solution that supports the modern worker while taking into consideration the organizations' current state to help build a customized yet affordable solution, which is exactly what Lumen Solutions for Webex can do.



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