

Unlocking Efficiency: The Inevitable Rise Of Knowledge Work Automation

Access A New Level Of Content And Information Management Maturity Through Automation

A FORRESTER CONSULTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER COMMISSIONED BY M-FILES, MARCH 2024

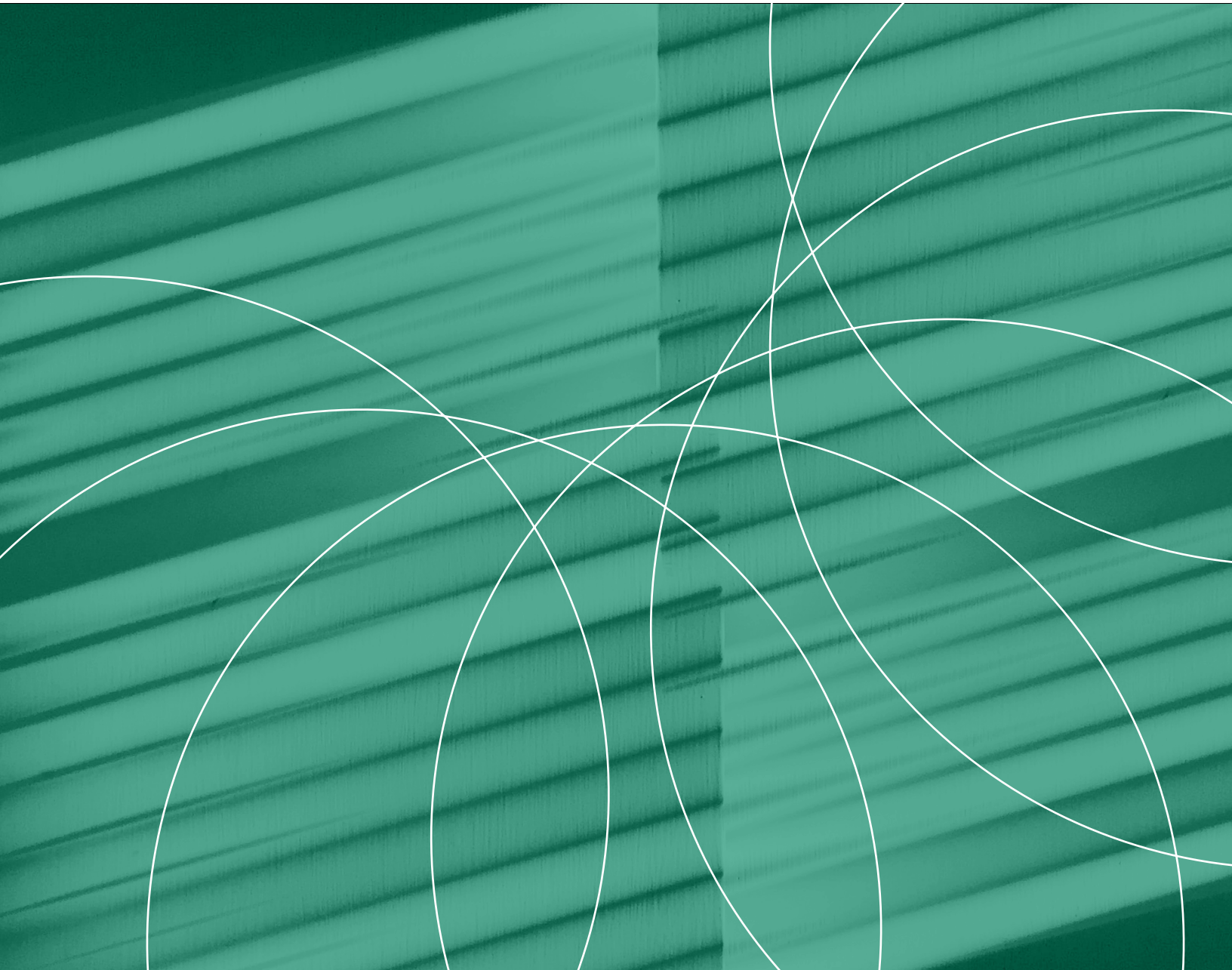


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Project Team:

Madeline Harrell,
Market Impact Consultant

Alex Martini,
Associate Market Impact Consultant

Contributing Research:

Forrester's Technology Architecture
And Delivery research group

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Executive Summary

Employee needs are pushing technology executives to rapidly automate processes to improve business operations, yet the day-to-day of knowledge workers remains largely untransformed. Knowledge workers — those whose primary capital is their store of information and critical thinking skills — are spending too much time on menial tasks, which limits their productivity and capacity for creative and strategic work. To free those workers whose job requires analyzing, understanding, and utilizing knowledge (e.g., lawyers, accountants, engineers, etc.) to do the intellectual work for which they were hired, companies must strategically adopt automation and AI. This starts with automating tedious tasks, automating workflows, enabling enterprise search, assisting with content creation and management, and more. Companies that get knowledge work automation right are expected to outperform those that don't with increased productivity, employee satisfaction, and competitive differentiation.

In February 2024, M-Files commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the current state of strategic maturity of content and information management at companies around the globe. To explore this topic, Forrester conducted an online survey with 415 respondents with decision-making influence in IT and business at their organizations. We found that while companies are moving in the right direction with their adoption of automation for everything from ad hoc tasks to complex workflows and knowledge work, most companies have a way to go toward optimizing enterprise content and information management.



Definitions

Knowledge worker: A high-level worker who applies theoretical and analytical knowledge, acquired through formal training, to develop products and services.

Knowledge work: A type of task requiring a knowledge worker to analyze and apply knowledge-backed insights in a social, organizational, and relational context for their company.

Key Findings

Companies are lost in overlapping software and application capabilities with limited ways to measure success and ROI. Employees are drowning in point solutions with no North Star to measure the success of their efforts.

Companies looking to increase the maturity of their information and their content management approaches are moving toward automating increasingly complex activities. Organizations are moving beyond ad hoc task automation into digital workflows and even automation of knowledge work.

Knowledge work automation is the future of employee efficiency. The most mature companies are seeing benefits of increasing their implementation of automation for advanced tasks.

The Landscape Is Primed For Advancements In Automation

Companies are aware that there is an opportunity for great growth in this area, but they are still working on laying the foundations for strategic improvements. Decision-makers know that offering a positive, efficient employee experience is critical to business success and that employee needs have been evolving alongside customer needs. Sixty-six percent of respondents in our survey indicated that the productivity needs, preferences and/or behaviors of their organization's employees have changed meaningfully in the past few years. Leadership is now tasked with understanding what these changing needs look like now and predicting how to get ahead of coming changes. In surveying 415 decision-makers involved in strategic decisions relating to their company's enterprise content and information management strategy, we found that:

- **Companies aspire to achieve advanced modes of automation to enable employees.** This is especially true when it comes to digital process automation and AI-driven/based/assisted automation. When respondents ranked their organizations' priorities for the coming year, growing revenue, innovation of products and brands, and improving the ability to innovate were all leaders. In order to deliver on these goals, organizations will need to take a new approach to how they enable employees.
- **Perceptions of potential high cost and complex deployment keep leadership from investing.** While the benefits of increased automation seem immense, there are some factors keeping leadership from investing. These include perceived high cost, disruption to customer experience (CX), lack of internal expertise to manage and implement new levels of automation, and the eventual migration and integration of data and applications. With many respondents saying their company currently suffers from poor application integration, taking the next step forward can feel uncertain. The path forward won't be the same for every organization and will depend largely on the steps it takes to lay the foundation for increased automation.

FIGURE 1

Information And Content Management Maturity Verticals

LEVEL	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Content And Information Management Strategy			
For companies to progress further into information and content management maturity, they must define their information and content management strategies. The most successful businesses will have their strategies aligned across IT, lines of business, and the executive suite.	No strategy or unaligned strategy	Strategy is IT-aligned to generally aligned across LOBs	Strategy is aligned across LOBs and has full buy-in from the executive suite
Governance			
Companies must know exactly what tools and capabilities they have, where they reside, and if they are compliant. Policies on varying types of data must be clear and adhered to in order to remain compliant with federal and global data protection and privacy laws.	No governance to minimal governance	May have a content inventory, is working to create a team of governance oversight board, and has some governance automation	Has a team for governance oversight including executive input and is AI-enabled
Technology IT infrastructure			
To streamline the employee workflow experience, companies must invest in tools that are usable, integrated, and provide support for otherwise manual work. The tools workers use for their primary roles should be up to date, cloud-enabled, interoperable, and support remote work.	Siloed systems and collaboration that is somewhat enabled	Focused on enabled collaboration, increasing levels of integration, unified information model	Majority of tech solutions are integrated, employees can seamlessly collaborate internally and externally, are automated and AI-informed
Level of automation and collaboration			
Organizations that adopt more advanced levels of automation to reduce information siloes and create optimized workflows have a leg up on the competition. By automating different stages of digital transformation, employees are free from previously-manual administrative tasks and can execute their primary work.	No automation or ad hoc levels of automation that may include automated naming and information structure	Administrative tasks are automated, moving toward automating workflows and permissions	Workflows are automated, some level of knowledge work is automated and AI-enabled, and parts of external or internal collaboration are automated
End-user enablement and capabilities			
The knowledge workforce should have an appropriate level of expertise and enablement to deploy and manage rich, cutting-edge applications within an interconnected system. Companies should actively enable employees to automate parts of their workdays within a secure, compliant environment.	Common capabilities and a low amount of initiatives for end users	Common industry capabilities, some advanced capabilities, and personalization may still be manual	Taking full advantage of available capabilities for personalization via AI

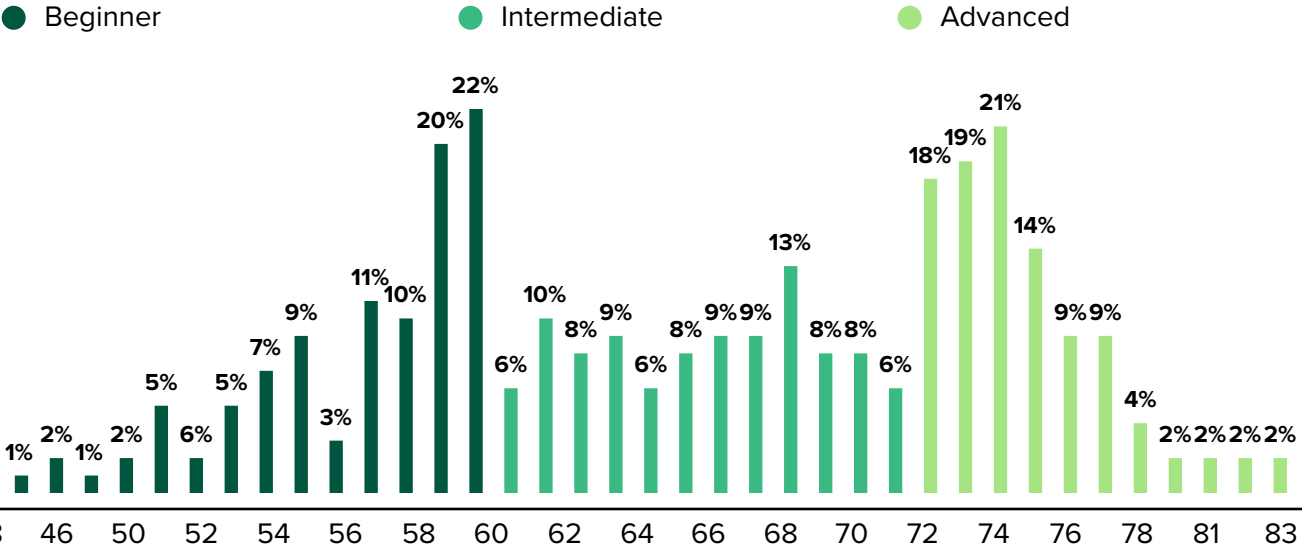
UNDERSTANDING ENTERPRISE CONTENT AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT MATURITY

To determine the enterprise content and information management maturity of our respondents' organizations, we asked the decision-makers a series of questions related to different facets of their companies' information and content and information management strategies and scored their responses to place their organizations on a maturity curve. Those facets include their information strategies, governance, technology environments, company cultures, and how they enable their knowledge worker employees.

From the weighted scores based on their behaviors and capabilities of their organizations in those areas, we identified three tiers of maturity: beginner, intermediate, and mature (see Figure 2). Of our respondents' companies, 14% are mature in their content and information management efforts, 60% are intermediate, and 27% are beginner.

FIGURE 2

Information And Content Management Maturity Scoring



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

An organization with a **beginner** information management strategy may still be ironing out the finer points of its initial strategy (e.g., assessing where their content lives across the organization). Its architecture could be more accessible but siloed from the rest of the organization. It may lack clear governance policies and education for employees around those policies, lack executive buy-in for its investments, and struggle to create a culture in which employees aren't actively encouraged to knowledge share. It also likely has multiple solutions with overlapping capabilities but lacks the appropriate level of automation for its employee enablement strategy.

An **intermediate** organization has a few more of its ducks in a row; it likely has a content and information management strategy and may have a more developed information architecture. It is increasing its collaboration across teams and siloes by enabling its employees with more streamlined workflows and solutions. It will also have a governance strategy and be working toward full compliance. It is also automating not just ad hoc tasks, but also administrative work and maybe even some employee workflows.

A company with an **advanced** strategy has full knowledge of what content it produces, who has access to it, and where it lives within its environment. It is in compliance with federal and global regulations and has a full governance strategy with executive buy-in and input. Its teams are able to easily collaborate across siloes and use their technology to improve their daily work experiences, and it likely has already automated administrative tasks and knowledge work.

The spread of maturity scores shows that the majority of respondents' organizations are somewhere in the middle of their journey toward a mature strategy while some are at the beginning of their journey and just a small percentage have unlocked the advanced benefits of mature content and information management. Across the curve, respondents' companies clustered at the points between levels, showing that there are certain capabilities that are standard stepping stones to a holistic approach to managing information.

Organizations that are more advanced in their adoption of automation are experiencing success in a different way from those in the beginner group. Looking specifically at the company cultures around content and information management, 84% of advanced respondents agreed that their organization has a clear understanding of the types of digital content it produces, consumes, or receives as part of business activities while just 42% of the beginner group respondents said they feel that way. Similarly, when asked if their organization encourages cross-team content and knowledge sharing and regularly co-creates content with colleagues and external stakeholders, just 27% of beginner respondents agreed, while 86% of advanced respondents agreed. But the cultural conditions are indicative of challenges that also penetrate at a technical level.

Organizations in the advanced group not only have a cultural edge on those in the lower maturity groups, but they also have a clear roadmap of their applications and an eye on continued modernization of architecture. When we asked respondents if their organization keeps its content, information management roadmaps, and applications up to date and if it's adopting modern content platforms and looking for opportunities to decommission or migrate from older architectures and adopt cloud where possible, 74% of advanced respondents agreed while just 41% of beginner respondents did. Similarly, when asked if their organization selects its content and information management technologies with an eye for usability and flexibility and if its platforms have modern APIs and support interoperability and provide a broad range of packaged integration, 81% of advanced respondents agreed while just 40% of beginner respondents did.

Companies Struggle To Increase Maturity When They Lack A Roadmap For Success

Without the context of KPIs and benchmarks to know how their organizations are doing, companies aren't sure where to begin to improve their enterprise content and information management strategies. Users are challenged by poor integration between tools and a general lack of central document repository/information architecture and strategy. To remedy this situation, organizations must first become familiar with their bottlenecks, set baseline standards of improvement, take stock of what expertise and technological capabilities they already possess, and then begin the path toward strategic improvements. When it comes to content and information creation and management, companies face a multifaceted set of challenges:

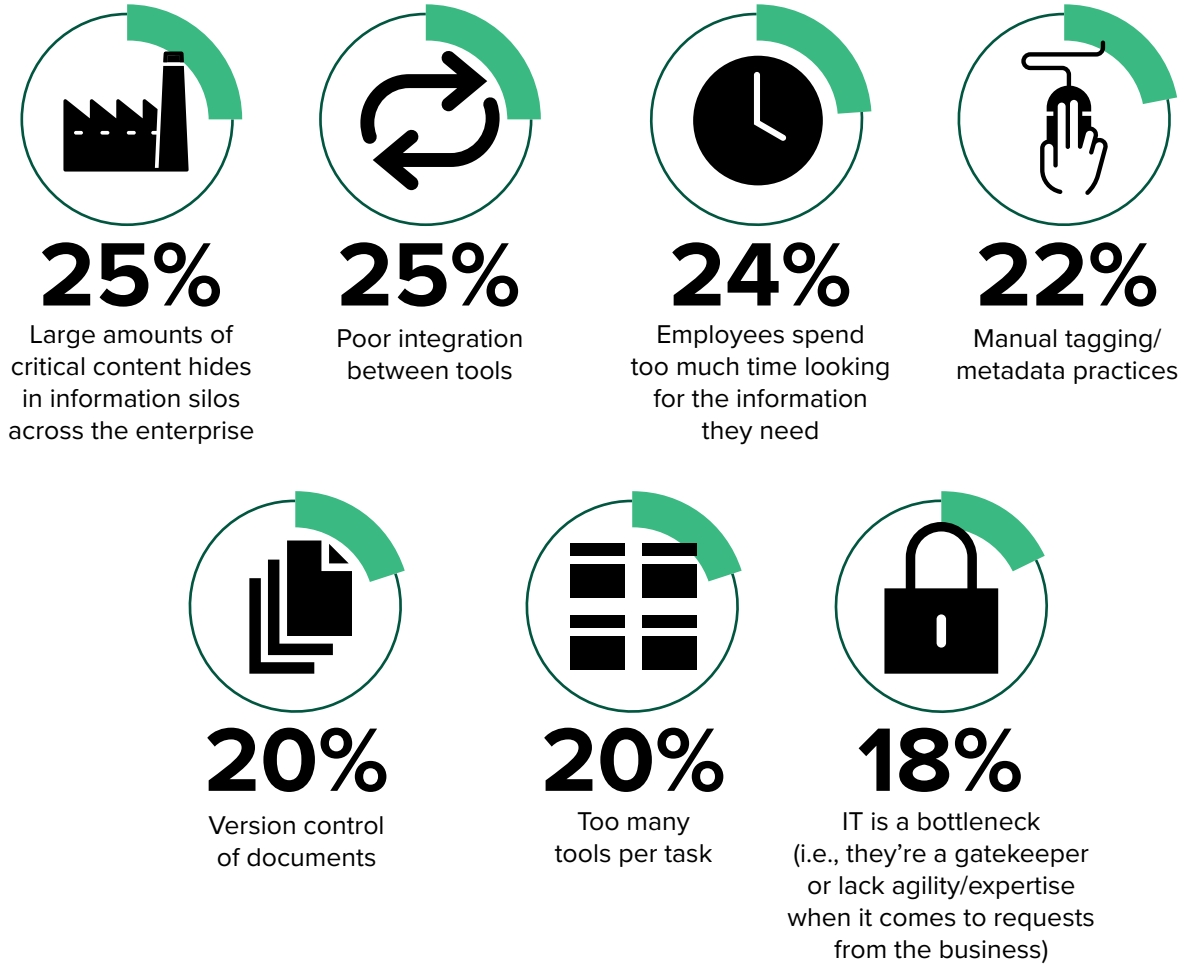
- **Document creation and collaboration challenges.** Companies' improvements are also hampered by a myriad of challenges in basic document-centric tasks; they are challenged by a lack of alignment across departments and within their data environments. These challenges span the document lifecycle starting with data being siloed across the organization to poor integration across applications. Once employees find the information they need, they still face manual tagging practices and version control issues. Without access to critical information and with difficulty sharing information and content across the business, productivity is hampered.

Beginner respondents said their organizations struggle with more basic tasks, while advanced respondents said their companies struggle with more high-level things, like culture and relationship with IT.

FIGURE 3

Document Creation And Collaboration Challenges

(Showing total respondents who answered “Challenging”)



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

Note: Total percentages may not equal separate values due to rounding.

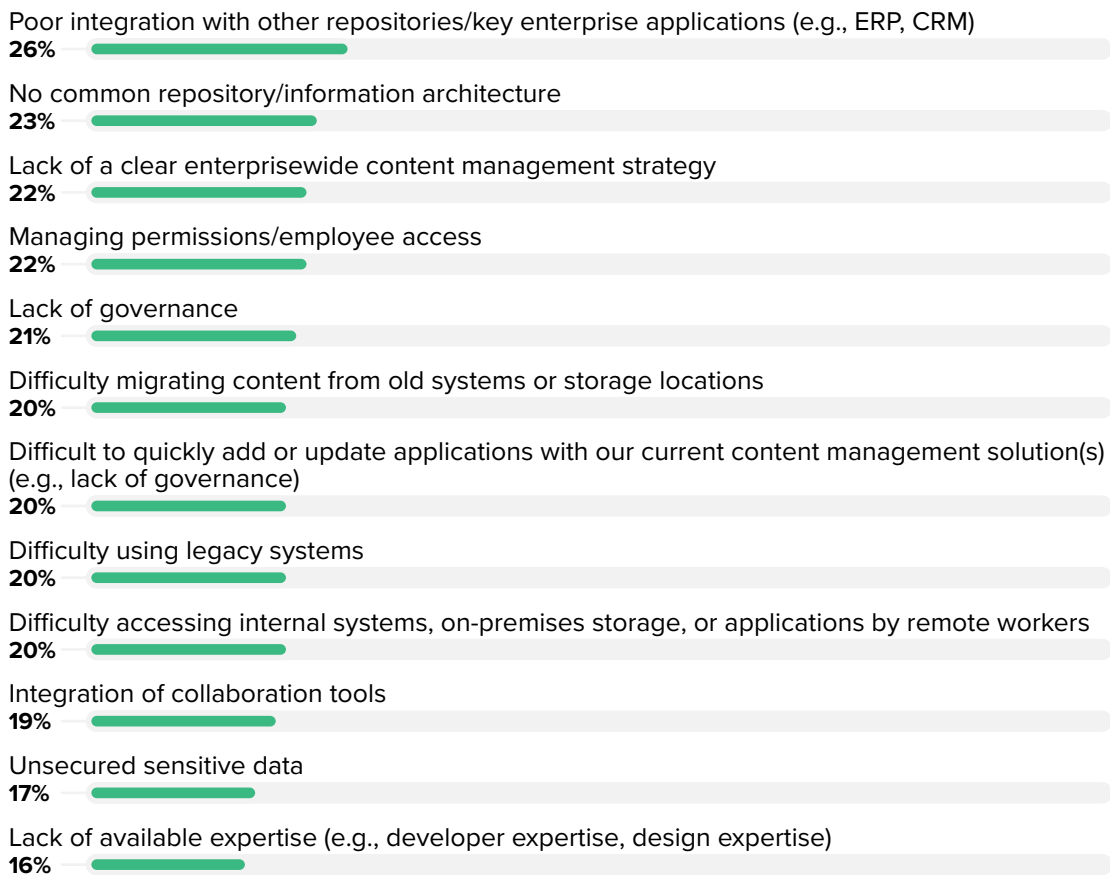
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

- Document management challenges.** Creation and collaboration are not the only pitfalls companies face with their current approaches to content and information management. Once the documents have been created — aside from collaboration — there is the task of management. While siloes are a big challenge, IT must tackle the mammoth task of managing content permissions and ensure the right workers can see the right documents. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said they do not agree that their organization’s IT is able to effectively and securely manage personnel access and permissions for viewing specific content.

FIGURE 4

Document Management Challenges

(Showing total respondents who answered “Challenging”)



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

Note: Total percentages may not equal separate values due to rounding.

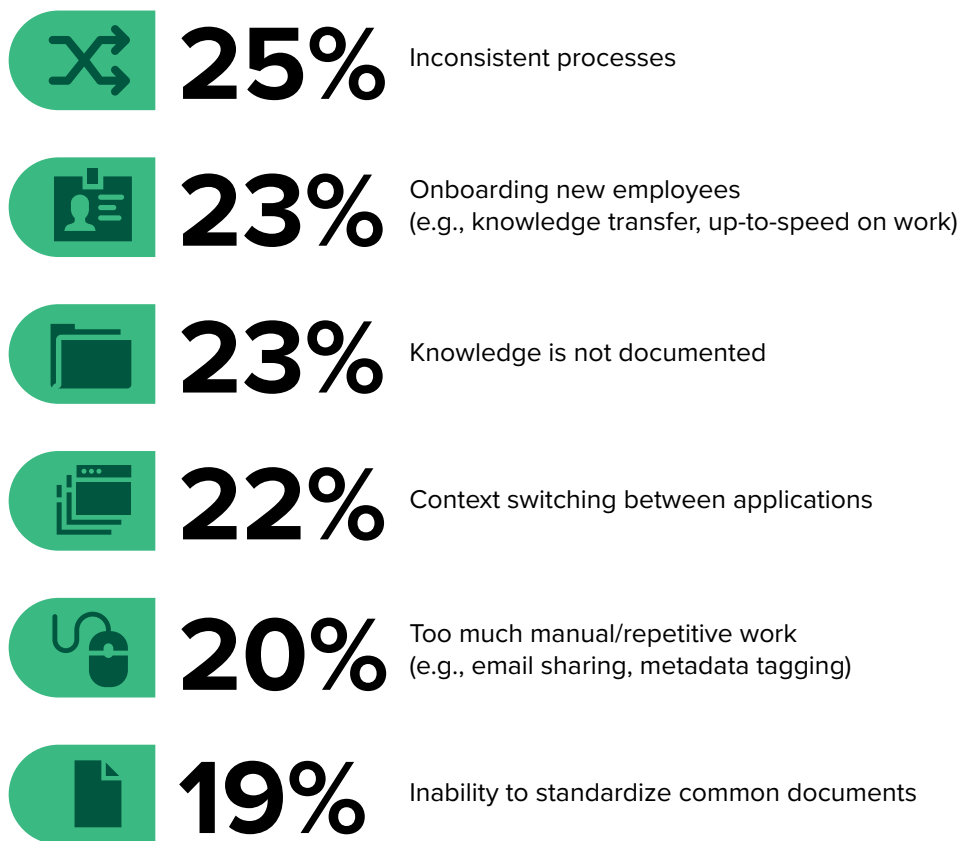
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 20

- **Challenges in enabling knowledge workers.** Aside from the content and information management challenges IT faces, the productivity of employees themselves is hampered by inconsistent processes, difficulty with knowledge transfer in employee onboarding, and context switching within a system that lacks proper integration between tools and applications. Surveyed decision-makers know that enabling knowledge workers to be more efficient begins and ends with their ability to access the right data at the right time; 67% said employee access to data is critical to EX.

FIGURE 5

Challenged By Knowledge Worker Enablement

(Showing total respondents who answered “Challenging”)



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

Note: Total percentages may not equal separate values due to rounding.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

- Challenges measuring and understanding success.** Respondents organizations currently track employee productivity, varying levels of cloud deployments, CX metrics, cost-benefit analyses, and reliability. But just because a company tracks something, it doesn't mean it does it well or that there is a standard across variable sizes and types of businesses. Beginner organizations currently prioritize metrics that monitor employee productivity, CX, and cost-benefit analysis. These are the metrics most organizations should be tracking as a baseline to build the foundation for more holistic strategies.

FIGURE 6

Digital Transformation Metrics Strategies Are Scattered



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

Intermediate organizations prioritize tracking their percentage of different cloud deployments, adoption and performance metrics, and reliability and availability. This shows that while these companies aren't forgetting about their EX and CX metrics, they're also taking stock of their current content and information environments while eyeing areas for modernization and improvement.

Advanced maturity organizations also track EX, CX, adoption, and performance metrics, but they are focused on the percentage of AI-enabled business more than organizations at any other maturity level. They are also monitoring revenue from digital technology so they can be sure they understand how their investments in emerging technologies enable their knowledge workers.

Unlock Business Benefits With Knowledge Work Automation

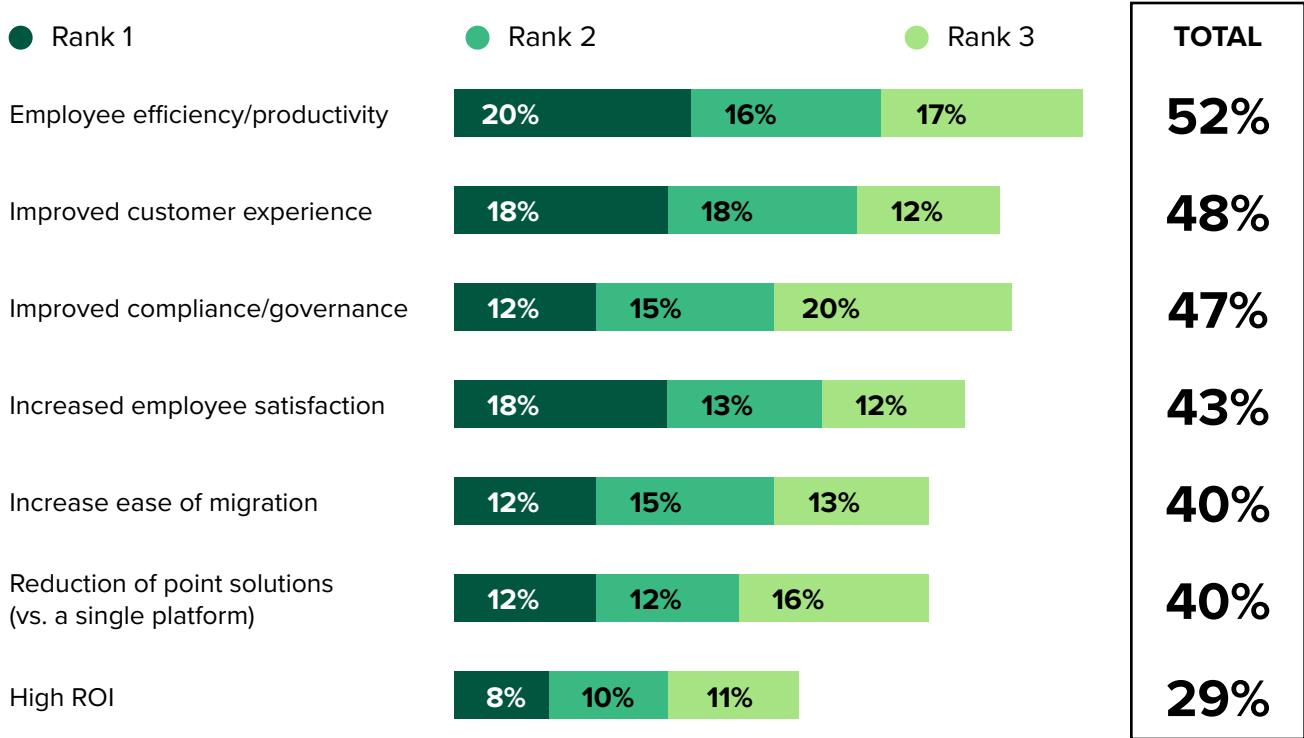
While most respondents said their organization is still working its way through challenges related to document creation, collaboration, and management, automating certain tasks and workflows can provide a great deal of relief to knowledge workers. Document management tools with built-in automation capabilities can provide employees with the extra level of autonomy they need to take control of their workdays. Employees can build more productive digital environments for them and their teams while staying within the boundaries of compliance and governance. When it comes to tools that enable this level of productivity, decision-makers have a wish list of specific capabilities and benefits:

- **Easier engagement with information for employees.** Buyers ready to invest are looking for capabilities and outcomes that would tip the scales and get their organizations to invest in increased automation capabilities. The business impacts they're looking for are led by employee-centric improvements in efficiency and productivity (52%), improved customer experience (48%), and improved compliance/governance and increased employee satisfaction (43%).

To accomplish these goals, companies will need some specific capabilities to enable their employees and to provide the best possible user experiences with the appropriate levels of automation. The most popular of the pack is the ability to engage with content and data with natural language followed by the ability to transform content for different audiences and the ability of platforms to have a digital assistant to create streamlined workflow experiences.

FIGURE 7

Drivers That Could Push Leadership To Invest/Increase Investment In Automation



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

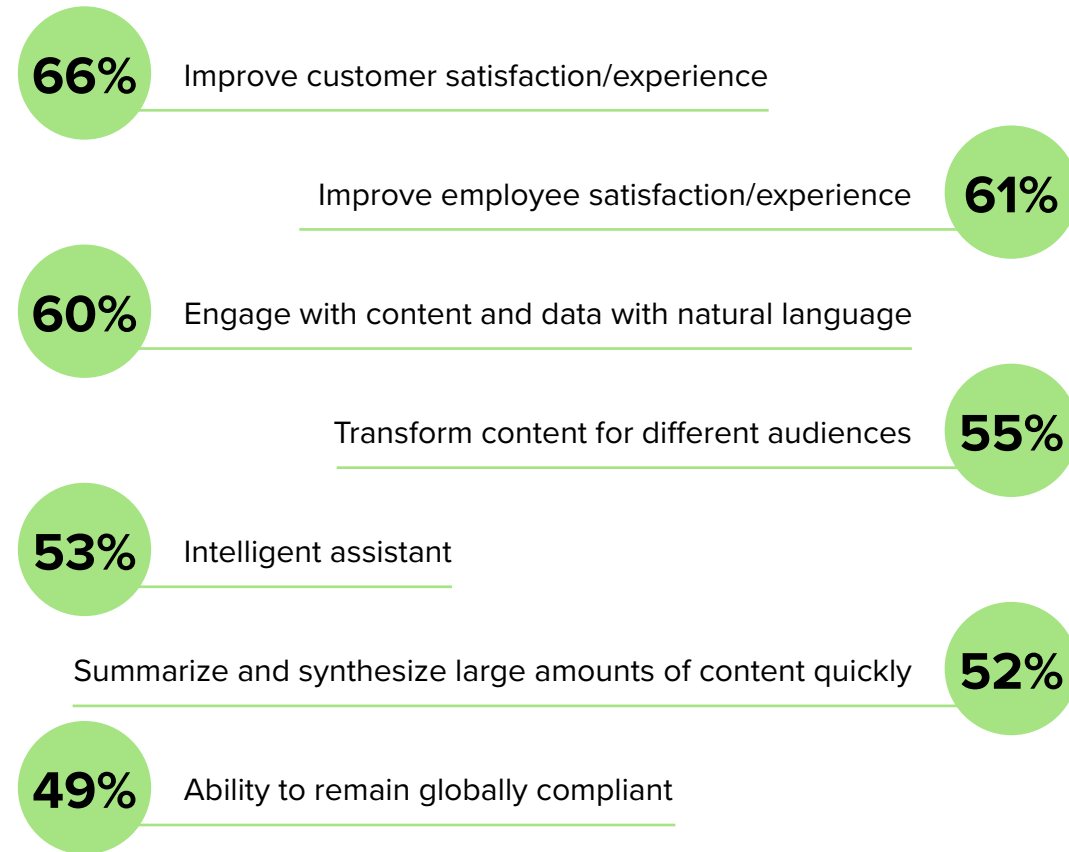
Note: Total percentages may not equal separate values due to rounding.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

When reviewing from a maturity perspective, respondents from advanced organizations indicated their organization’s technology gives it the ability to stay agile in decision-making (79%) while the respondents from beginner and intermediate organizations said their company falls short in that category (65% and 68%, respectively). This was also true when asked if their organization utilizes an insights-driven approach to decision-making: 76% of respondents from advanced companies said their organization takes an insights-driven approach, while just 64% of respondents from the beginner group said their company does the same. These are all clear indicators that the more advanced organizations use their technology and strategies in concert to drive more streamlined, data-backed strategies.

FIGURE 8

“What capabilities would your organization expect out of a platform that enables a single solution for creating, managing, storing, securing and complying of information and incorporates automation?”



Base: 415 directors+ in business and technology roles that influence or decide on technology that addresses challenges associated with content creation and management, workflows, security/compliance, and optimizing the productivity and satisfaction of knowledge workers/employees at their organization

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of M-Files, January 2024

- **Offset the perception of high cost of investment with benefits.** While initial adoption of a new platform requires time and cost outlay, the investment can propel companies forward in their journeys toward improved content and information management maturity in a way that will pay for itself over time. Using the right vendor and solution can provide fast time to value with the right implementation and onboarding. Companies that make progress toward the automation of knowledge work can expect benefits in both EX and revenue, offsetting the perceived potential high costs of investing in automation.

Key Recommendations

Information workers across industries depend on data, content, and knowledge to perform tasks, make decisions, and bring experience to their interactions with internal and external stakeholders. The volume of information makes it impossible to scale modern work without increasing reliance on automation and exploring where AI can provide relief from repetitive work. Business and technical leaders are ready to embark on the journey to a mature and modern approach to automation with the right metrics, tools, and goals.

Forrester's in-depth survey of 415 respondents with decision-making influence in IT and business at their organizations yielded several important recommendations:

Assess the current state of your approach to content and information management.

Understand how data and documents play a role in meeting not only big-picture corporate goals, but how they also enable or frustrate employees as they work toward these objectives.

Listen to employees to understand their productivity pain points.

Quantitative data (e.g., reports, analytics) and qualitative data (surveys, interviews) can reveal important bottlenecks in knowledge work, such as task repetition, manual creation of content, or time wasted while accessing multiple systems for related information.

Highlight your automation opportunities.

Call out where simplified workflows, automated content generation, or easier engagement with complex documentation will not only ease employees' daily work but where it also will contribute to measurable improvements to revenue-related activities, compliance efforts, or information reuse across projects or client engagements.

Determine meaningful success metrics.

Adopt a continuous improvement mindset when incorporating higher levels of automation and AI exploration. Consider time savings, higher employee or customer satisfaction, faster time to revenue, or the ability to complete more work without additional resources. Refine and adapt the metrics as you learn where automation and AI are producing results.

Repeat this innovation cycle to move to higher levels of knowledge work automation.

Keep on top of the AI and automation offerings from current solution providers or seek one with a platform that is a better fit. Seek to move into the next level of information management maturity that makes sense for your organization without losing sight of key corporate goals and objectives.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, M-Files commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the current state of strategic maturity of enterprise content and information management at companies around the globe. Forrester conducted an online survey with 415 respondents with decision-making influence in IT and business at their organizations to explore this topic. Questions provided to the participants asked about the current collaboration and document creation tools their companies provide employees and the challenges and benefits to increasing the automation present in their chosen suite of tools/platform. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study began in January 2024 and was completed in February 2024.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data

GEOGRAPHY	
United States	21%
India	16%
Australia	15%
United Kingdom	8%
Mexico	8%
Germany	7%
France	6%
Spain	5%
Canada	5%
The Netherlands	4%
Sweden	2%
Norway	1%
Finland	1%

ROLE LEVEL	
C-level executive	19%
Vice president	35%
Director	47%

INDUSTRY	
Financial services and/or insurance	13%
Manufacturing and materials	10%
Healthcare	9%
Electronics	9%
Business or professional services	9%
Construction	8%
Transportation and logistics	7%
Energy, utilities, waste management	7%
Consumer product goods and/or manufacturing	7%
Agriculture, food/beverage	7%
Consumer services	6%
Government	5%
Legal services	3%

Appendix B: Demographics/Data (continued)

REVENUE	
<\$1M	1%
\$1M to \$49M	2%
\$50M to \$99M	10%
\$100M to \$199M	14%
\$200M to \$299M	17%
\$300M to \$399M	18%
\$400M to \$499	16%
\$500M to \$999M	11%
\$1B to \$5B	7%
>\$5B	5%

DEPARTMENT	
Operations	21%
IT	20%
Finance/accounting	19%
Marketing/advertising	14%
Human resources/training	14%
Sales	12%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

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