Consolidate to innovate

Optimizing the AI-driven tech stack

asana

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine your organization's software ecosystem as a bustling city. Each app is like a different mode of transport—some are sleek and efficient, while others are outdated and cumbersome. Navigating this city can become a chaotic, time-consuming ordeal, leading to frustration and inefficiency. Not only do you feel the pain, everyone around you does, too. The average knowledge worker spends nearly an hour and a half just looking for the information they need to get their work done—each day.

Now, imagine streamlining all these modes of transport into a high-speed, interconnected transit system. That's the power of consolidation and optimization, whether by vendor or application. It turns your software into an integrated, efficient work landscape, boosting productivity and saving time, money, and countless headaches. Even better, your investments in AI capabilities now have richer and more structured data to work with because your systems are finally talking to each other. The future is not with isolated AI chat bots; it's with contextual, AI-powered collaboration.

Time wasted due to collaboration tools

Knowledge workers spend:

84 minutes per day — **Looking for the information they need to get their work done**

57 minutes per day — **Switching between collaboration tools**

30 minutes per day — **Deciding what collaboration technologies they should use for a specific task**

Source: Work Innovation Lab by Asana: The State of Collaboration Technology

Consider Wayne Kurtzman's brand new research for the 2024 IDC Annual Collaboration Study[1], covering North America and Western Europe. He shares how a thoughtfully curated, AI-driven tech stack can be transformative to businesses. It's all about the right apps built on the right tech stack. Add integrations that encourage and support proper team collaboration, and now you also have a major impact on productivity, delivering back 22 hours per week in time savings *per user*, according to Kurtzman's research.

"The connected worker is the new knowledge worker, helping drive market growth," Kurtzman writes. "Globally, businesses are identifying and connecting their full workforce, including connecting contractors and frontline workers, to their collaborative stack of applications. Their connectedness helps inform AI models with greater context, resulting in better decision-making." More mature enterprises use integrations to blend data from multiple systems and track the results, learning from their actions to constantly iterate and innovate.

An AI-driven tech stack saves

22 hours per week per user.

[1]IDC, IDC's Annual Collaboration Survey, 2024: Measuring the Collaborative Evolution — North America and Western Europe, Doc # US51376624, August 2024

"The connected worker is the new knowledge worker, helping drive market growth. Globally, businesses are identifying and connecting their full workforce, including connecting contractors and frontline workers, to their collaborative stack of applications. Their connectedness helps inform AI models with greater context, resulting in better decision-making.

Wayne Kurtzman
Research VP, Social, Communities and Collaboration at IDC

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves here.

This journey toward the ideal tech stack isn’t just about numbers. It’s about people: Everyone has unique preferences and even emotional attachments to their favorite work tools. Just like how some people will only visit their favorite coffee shop, employees can be fiercely loyal to their preferred software. This connection makes the process of consolidation and optimization a delicate balancing act.

It’s worth the effort. Vendor consolidation / app optimization is critical for organizations seeking to drive substantial cost savings and operational efficiency. It has the power to transform your organization and enable the kind of business agility your teams need to keep up with competitors.

Let’s walk together through the benefits, strategies, and steps necessary for successful vendor consolidation—and eliminate “tech bloat” for good.

SECTION 1

Why consolidation; why now?

We're all familiar with the shift to remote and hybrid work environments during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital transformation across industries and triggered companies to rapidly adopt numerous apps to boost collaboration.

Now all that dust is settling.

SaaS portfolio size reached a ceiling at the beginning of 2023, bringing with it a critical need to consolidate these apps and optimize digital infrastructure for long-term efficiency. The average SaaS portfolio is between 217-479 apps, and yet, according to our research, 15 is the magic number for enterprise companies (for smaller and mid-sized businesses, it's approximately 11). Our data reveals that beyond 15 digital collaboration tools, additional technology tends to clutter rather than clarify, adding noise, confusion, and increasing exhaustion for most companies.

In fact, within IT, there's an inclination for product suites and apps that address multiple use cases, indicating a strong preference for tools that allow for better app consolidation.

Beyond 15 digital collaboration tools, additional technology tends to clutter rather than clarify.

SECTION 2

Immediate benefits of app consolidation

Single source of truth

In his research for IDC, Kurtzman writes that “work becomes easier for people as they create a personalized digital workspace that acts as a ‘single pane of glass’ to their work. The integration of core IT and marketing technology stacks into the collaborative stack drives productivity, new insights, and new AI-augmented digital era metrics.”

According to our research, people agree. A full 74% of knowledge workers are craving more standardization—saying they prefer that everyone in their organization use the same set of core collaboration technologies. Using a single platform to monitor tasks, projects, and organizational goals centralizes data, improves collaboration, and enhances efficiency.

These benefits can extend to contractors and vendors as well, if you choose tools rooted in today’s workforce realities, which means balancing collaboration, access, and risk no matter who is working on what project, or where.

Here’s a snapshot of what that transformation could look like.

74% **of knowledge workers prefer everyone in their organization use the same set of core collaboration technologies.**

Before

Most teams, organizations, and regions lack visibility into the progress of people or projects within their organization.

For most lines of business there is no singular platform through which they monitor tasks, projects, and performance to goals.

Data and workflow standardization doesn’t exist; departments are utilizing different tools in different configurations. There is barely standardization in processes between business units that collaborate or have overlapping responsibilities.

Most teams specifically purchase, implement, and design tools for the team that uses them. Normally, other teams don’t utilize these tools because most software is designed for niche use cases. This is counter-productive.

After

With all information accessible in one place, any line of business can work together seamlessly, ensuring consistency and reducing the risk of miscommunication.

With real-time tracking and accountability, you can enable better decision-making and keep everyone aligned with organizational goals.

A singular platform standardizes processes, streamlines workflows, and integrates automation, making it intuitive to scale and adapt as the business grows.

Every team needs a modern, functional way to communicate—that’s not niche. By adopting a singular work management platform, all teams can compare notes and share communications seamlessly, even in an emergency.

Financial efficiency, security, and compliance

After years of building quick workarounds and one-off solutions, tech stacks have become massively complex. Then there are the indirect costs associated with maintaining and training staff on multiple platforms. Consolidating facilitates a more budget-friendly, scalable IT environment that supports long-term financial health. For example, by reducing the number of redundant applications in use, you can eliminate overlapping functionalities and choose the most effective tools, saving money on unnecessary licenses.

Managing a smaller set of applications also makes it easier to implement robust security measures and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. When fewer apps are in use, the attack surface is minimized, lowering the risk of vulnerabilities and breaches.

Enhancing security is top of mind for businesses everywhere. According to The Annual SaaS Security Report: 2025 CISO Plans and Priorities, 73% of security professionals listed “achieving visibility into business-critical apps” as their biggest challenge.

Consolidating facilitates a more budget-friendly, scalable IT environment that supports long-term financial health.

Enabling innovation

According to a study by McKinsey, as much as 71% of the impact from business transformations depends on technology. Optimizing your tech stack enables your teams to become “tech forward,” driving continual improvements and fine-tuning productivity.

Centralizing your vendors also improves interoperability.

Peter Yeung, Optimizely’s Chief Information Officer and Global Data Protection Officer, notes that, “by consolidating software providers, CIOs can simplify the integration process and improve interoperability between systems. Key providers are more likely to offer purpose-built APIs and pre-built integrations that allow their software to communicate with other systems. This reduces the time and effort required to integrate systems, while also helping to make sure that data flows smoothly to improve organizational efficiency.”

“With so many apps in the modern stack, companies are taking a serious look at how to reduce tech bloat and optimize their tech stacks. Doing that effectively necessitates a data-driven approach. Only by looking at the data can we start to really understand how apps impact productivity and connectedness in an organization and to make rational decisions about which apps should stay and which should go. Employees will also be more likely to buy in when they can trust that the decisions are backed by hard evidence. The result is an optimized, data-backed tech stack that helps the whole company thrive and win.

Dr. Mark Hoffman
Collaborative Intelligence Lead
at Work Innovation Lab by Asana

SECTION 3

Getting started

A great place to start is with evidence-based strategies.

Work Innovation Lab, in collaboration with Amazon Web Services, conducted a “collaboration cleanse” intervention to tackle the issue of collaboration technology overload and better understand the science behind effectively streamlining your tech stack.

The Work Innovation Lab study found that effective change to combat technology overload should come from top-level management. Despite increased awareness and willingness among employees to minimize tool use, the interdependent nature of collaboration tools made it nearly impossible for individual employees to effect meaningful change on their own. This is a place where top-down effort can pay off.

Evaluation frameworks

Determining the right approach for any consolidation or optimization begins with an effective evaluation framework. Organizations should first decide whether to prioritize the sheer number of apps or focus on app usage statistics. Important metrics to consider include license utilization over a 90-day period and API call frequency, which can indicate how often and how effectively apps are being used. By analyzing these metrics, you can identify redundant or underutilized applications that can be phased out.

Additionally, evaluating the integration capabilities of each app with existing systems is crucial. This ensures that the chosen software can seamlessly connect with business intelligence tools like Looker, Google Data Studio, and Tableau, as well as other essentials like Slack, JIRA, and Microsoft Office. Developing a clear framework for evaluation helps in making informed decisions and sets the stage for a successful strategy.

Consolidation starts with a tech audit

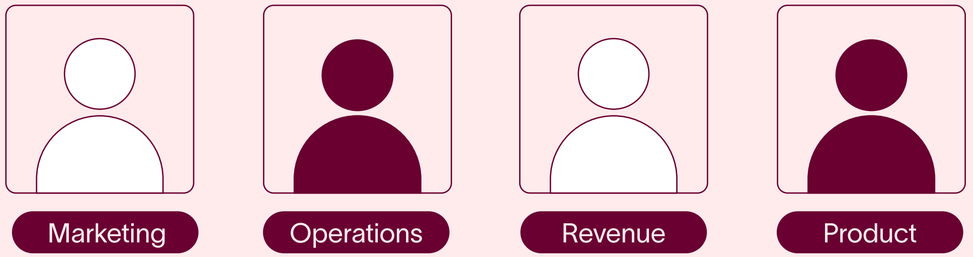
Tech audits are central to successful vendor consolidation.
Here are the steps Work Innovation Lab recommends:

01

Build your tech stack council

Gather a cross-departmental team to evaluate the tech stack your employees rely on. Think of this group as a “jury” who can use data and functional use cases for an objective evaluation.

Include a representative from every major functional group in your organization, such as marketing, operations, revenue, and product. Buy-in now helps organization-wide adoption later.



02

Conduct a tool audit

A tool audit helps you set a course for optimization.
Consider two steps:

1. **Inventory roundup**

   Create a comprehensive list of every software and application at play within the organization. This list helps quantify the scope.

2. **Categorization**

   With your list in hand, categorize each tool based on its primary function. Use the categories in this table as an anchor.

The relationship between tool categories and productivity

Tool category	Ideal number of collaboration tools in tech stack[1]	Increase in likelihood of feeling very productive when employee uses technology	Additional increase in likelihood of feeling very productive when all employees use technology
Business Operations	3	55%	+4%
Communication/ Conferencing	2 (in addition to email)	36%	+39%
Data analytics	2	40%	+23%
Design/Visual	1	43%	+16%
Document file management	3	35%	+40%
Work management	1	40%	+20%

[1] Adding another tool beyond the ideal numbers identified here won't necessarily harm productivity. However, you won't see the same kinds of positive gains you do when building your initial tech stack leading up to those ideal numbers.

03

Redesign your tech stack

Employees crave standardization in tech stacks to reduce complexity. Evaluate tools based on key factors for optimal productivity in each category, as outlined in the table above. We recommend a specific number of tools per category that we've found to be most effective (such as two for communication and conferencing). While your organization's needs may vary, use this as a starting point.

Don't discard tools solely because they're not widely used. Some teams may have specialized needs. In such cases, formally identify and justify the unique requirement. Whether it's an exclusive feature, compliance, data security, or another critical factor, these tools should be retained if they meet non-negotiable needs.

When choosing tools, consider the following criteria:

Current usage

How often is the technology being used and by whom?

Impact

The impact the tool has on your company objectives.

Effort

How much effort does it take to learn to use the technology?

Interoperability

How well does each tool integrate with others?

Degree of cross-functional support:

68% of knowledge workers say that they work with people in a different function than theirs daily. The best tools will break down silos across functions.

04

Initiate a vendor showdown

If needed, set up a direct comparison or even a live “bake-off” to determine which tool best meets your needs. Use empirical evidence, such as head-to-head metrics comparisons, to make your final call, keeping in mind to optimize for business value over time.

05

Run proof-of-concept trials with technology vendors

Test new tools with a small-scale project before full commitment. Measure their impact against existing tools in real-world settings to validate or challenge perceived benefits. Ensure team buy-in to boost long-term effectiveness and reduce tech fatigue. This “proof of concept” approach mitigates risk, as small-scale mistakes are less costly than company-wide rollouts of untested tools.

06

Communicate about your enterprise tech stack, the “rules of the road,” and provide training

Most employees (74%) prefer a unified set of collaboration tools, with 45% desiring training on effective collaboration. Standardizing tools and providing training reduces employee exhaustion from managing multiple tools and constant switching.

Organizations must clearly communicate their chosen tech stack and establish usage guidelines. Comprehensive training programs are crucial, covering both technical aspects and best practices for digital communication and teamwork. This approach ensures teams are equipped with the right tools and skills, ultimately enhancing productivity and collaboration.

07

Integrate to simplify

A smarter tool stack balances consolidation with integration. Excessive tools create financial strain and user fatigue, with 64% of knowledge workers reporting digital exhaustion. Integrations offer a simple solution to reduce tool count. By connecting tools on a centralized work management platform, you eliminate the need for constant switching, streamlining workflows and reducing exhaustion.

74% of employees prefer a unified set of collaboration tools

45% of employees desire training on effective collaboration

64% of knowledge workers report digital exhaustion

08

Decommission tools that don’t make the cut

Once a tool is deemed expendable, follow a standardized offboarding protocol. This includes data migration, user notification, and formal termination of service contracts. Develop a routine process and share it widely with your department, ensuring consistency and compliance.

09

Optimize vendor relationships

Building a strong relationship with tech vendors can be a gamechanger. Vendors can offer insights into features that could benefit multiple departments, negotiate pricing, or even develop custom functionalities. This long-term approach not only adds value to your tech stack but can also make IT’s life easier by providing more complete, integrated solutions.

This research from Asana’s Work Innovation Lab surveyed 3,004 knowledge workers in the United States and United Kingdom in October 2023. The survey was administered via Qualtrics and data collection was conducted by Prolific and did not target Asana customers or employees.

SECTION 4

The cost of doing nothing

Productivity and cost implications

Working amid unchecked app sprawl will drag down productivity and inflate costs. When employees use multiple unapproved tools, it creates a fragmented environment that can lead to duplicated efforts and inefficiencies, wasting valuable time and resources.

Additionally, maintaining numerous redundant applications incurs significant licensing and maintenance costs, straining your organization's budget. The complexity of managing a sprawling app ecosystem also increases the risk of errors. Unmanaged IT environments pose legal and security risks, particularly concerning data privacy and compliance regulations.

Risk of dragging down your AI investments

Consolidating and optimizing your tech stack is a strategic move to future-proof operations against the rapid advancements in AI. Without a unified system, gathering and processing data from disparate sources becomes challenging, slowing down AI initiatives. A fragmented app landscape complicates data integration and analytics, which are critical for effective AI deployment.

Put simply: If your data is all over the place, you can't take full advantage of AI.

SECTION 5

Managing change when optimizing your tech stack

Overcoming resistance

Ultimately, transparency and engagement are the keys to overcoming resistance to change.

Employees may fear changes to their work tools will limit their flexibility and control. To mitigate this, it's essential to highlight the long-term benefits and upsides of consolidation, such as improved efficiency and collaboration, reduced costs, and enhanced security.

To help win over skeptics, it can be helpful to demonstrate how consolidation can streamline workflows and reduce daily frustrations. Involving key stakeholders in the decision-making process can also foster a sense of ownership and collaboration. By openly communicating the reasons behind the consolidation and the expected benefits, organizations can ease the transition and build support for the change.

Change management strategies

“Trust is central to digital work, yet it is complex as trust is gained in drops and lost in buckets,” Kurtzman, the IDC analyst, advises in his research. Start with a comprehensive communication plan to keep stakeholders informed at every stage of the transition. Clearly outline the benefits, timelines, and expectations to alleviate any concerns. Regular updates via emails, meetings, and internal platforms can help maintain transparency and build trust.

Additionally, offer training sessions to ease the transition for employees. These sessions should focus on demonstrating the new system’s functionalities and addressing any questions. Providing hands-on training and resources, such as user guides and FAQs, can further facilitate the adoption process. Encouraging feedback and being responsive to concerns also fosters a supportive environment.

Building an effective tech stack involves stakeholders at all levels of the organization. While executives wield the most influence in these decisions, every employee has a role to play. It’s a dynamic interplay of top-down and bottom-up change. Absent top-down change, the tech stack risks becoming fragmented and misaligned with strategic objectives. Conversely, without bottom-up change, technologies risk low adoption as they won’t resonate with daily work.

Dr. Rebecca Hinds
Head of Work Innovation Lab
at Asana

SECTION 6

Revisiting your tech stack

Tech audits are like health check-ups for your company's digital toolkit. Proactively reviewing your tech stack is essential to maintaining an efficient and effective IT environment.

Best practices suggest conducting evaluations at least annually to ensure that all applications are still meeting the organization's needs. However, in fast-paced industries or during periods of rapid growth, more frequent reviews—such as quarterly or biannually—may be necessary.

Key indicators that signal it’s time to reassess your software landscape:

Fewer logins or API calls? Your team might be losing interest in some apps. Time to check if they’re still useful.

Listen to your staff. If they’re constantly griping about certain tools, it’s probably time for a rethink.

New tech or process changes? Take a fresh look at your tools to make sure they still fit your needs and goals.

High maintenance costs or frequent downtime can also indicate that an application is more trouble than it’s worth.

Continuous monitoring can help identify underperforming or redundant apps, enabling timely adjustments. Regular reviews also allow organizations to stay updated with the latest advancements and ensure that their tech stack remains aligned with current business goals and technological trends.

WHAT'S AHEAD

Emerging technologies and continuous improvement

Innovations such as AI, machine learning, and blockchain technology are rapidly transforming various industries and can significantly impact your strategies here.

01	02	03
AI and machine learning can automate complex tasks, enabling more efficient workflows and better decision-making.	Blockchain technology offers enhanced security and transparency, which can be particularly beneficial for managing sensitive data.	Advancements in cloud computing and edge computing are making it easier to deploy and scale applications efficiently.

Staying informed about these emerging technologies allows you to best leverage the latest tools and trends to stay competitive and maintain efficiency. Encourage feedback from employees to identify areas for enhancement and make informed decisions about which applications to keep, upgrade, or replace.

The state of collaboration technology is at a crossroads, demanding we use strategic interventions to decode digital clutter and reset tech stacks for enhanced productivity. Repercussions of a cluttered tech stack are not purely financial: The effects of toggling between apps and lack of control over digital clutter are seen in employee productivity and feelings of digital exhaustion. However, by staying proactive and encouraging a culture that values continuous improvement, you can adapt more easily to changes, optimize your workflows, and sustain high levels of productivity—now and well into the future.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