ecosystm.

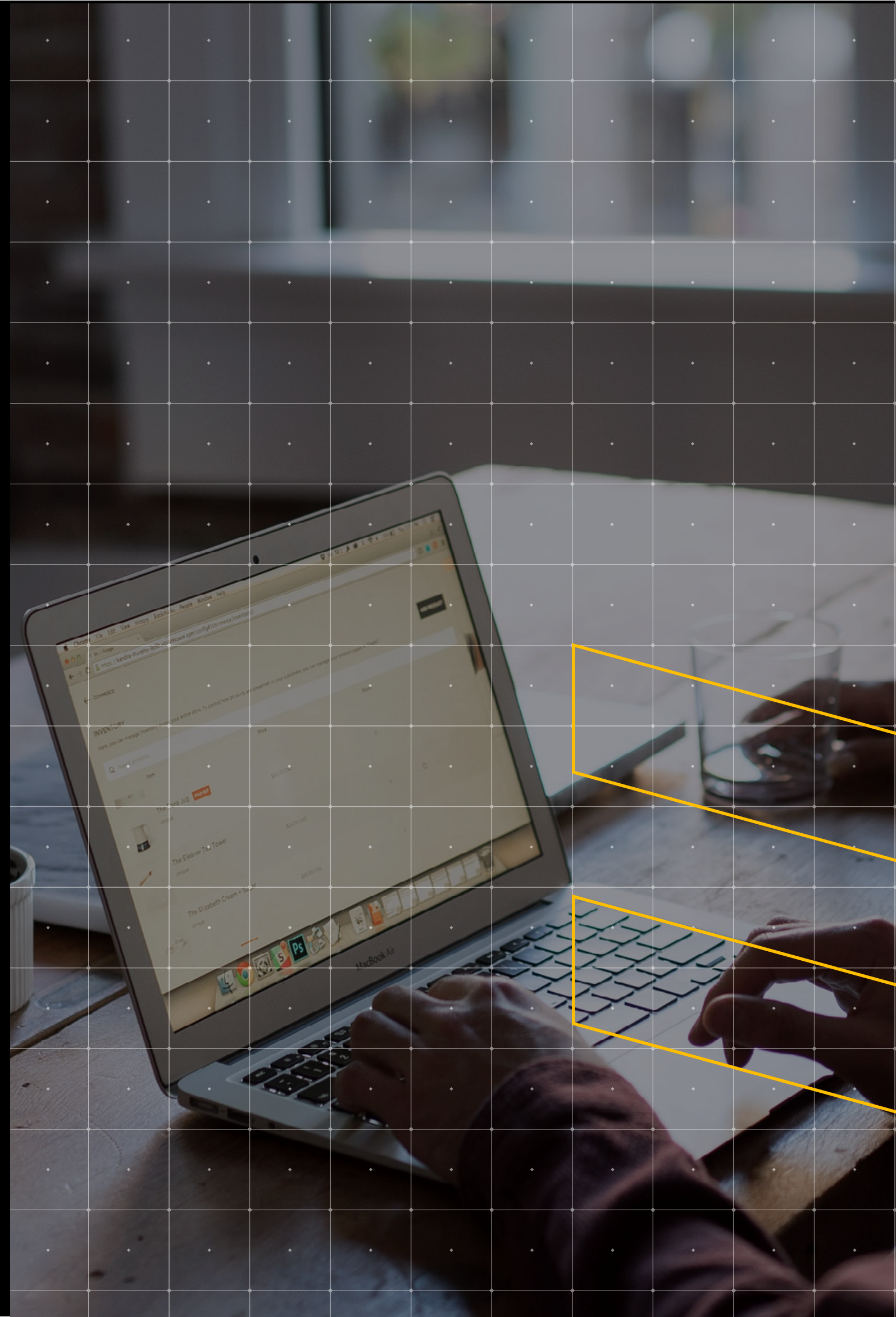# Secure Work Strategies: Considerations for 2024

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NEXON | CISCO

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No Turning Back: The Evolution of the Hybrid Work Model

65% of the current Australian workforce prefer the hybrid work model.

The Ecosystm Voice of Employee Study, 2024

Today's employees have become accustomed to the benefits of reduced commute times and flexible work schedules, with a strong emphasis on improved work-life balance and productivity. In 2024, the hybrid work model is set to evolve, with organisations enhancing policies and technologies for seamless remote and in-office collaboration.

Fostering collaboration in hybrid teams has driven technology adoption in organisations, not only to empower remote employees but also to transform employee experience and self-service through chatbots and virtual assistants.

Ensuring the effectiveness of these novel work approaches requires deploying cloud services and edge devices for seamless functionality, regardless of the chosen work location. This also impacts network and security management to improve employee experience and protect sensitive data. It involves ensuring robust and secure LAN, Wi-Fi, SD-WAN, and the growing adoption of secure access service edge (SASE) architectures to achieve an always-on outcome.

5 Trends Defining Workplaces in 2024

#1 Collaboration Beyond Cities: Investing in Regional Connectivity

39% of Australia's knowledge workers are looking to change residence in 2024 – including moving to the suburbs.
The Ecosystm Voice of Employee Study, 2024

Rising housing expenses and the popularity of hybrid work will redefine how Australians view living outside city boundaries. Outer suburbs, commuter towns, and regional centres will become more attractive as the workforce recognises that daily commutes are a thing of the past. With employees remaining local, these communities will thrive, giving rise to 'third places' for work, such as shops, restaurants, and meeting centres. The concept of the 15-minute city is starting to take shape.

Collaborative spaces, whether virtual or physical, will also become more prevalent, and companies will adopt a hub-and-spoke approach to office locations. The increasingly distributed workforce is creating demand for high performance, reliable connectivity that extends beyond urban boundaries – and will be supported by Security Service Edge (SSE) solutions to enable secure, scalable access to applications from any location. This will drive investment not just from ISPs but also from organisations providing greater support for home networks.

#2

Digital Workplaces: Enhancing Employee Productivity and Loyalty

Improving the entire employee journey, from recruitment to off-boarding, will be essential for talent retention and attraction.

Prioritising employee experience will be a key focus for organisations. HR, facilities management, and technology teams will collaborate to create positive and inclusive work environments. They will focus on building offices that are social connection hubs where employees can have meaningful experiences.

While HR policies will evolve based on employee feedback, facilities management teams will work on healthy and productive workspaces that are designed with employee wellness and experience in mind. Many organisations will take the opportunity to build flexible office spaces to encourage social interaction, support neurodiversity, and cater to changing employee needs throughout the day. Technology will be the key enabler as organisations continue to evolve collaboration tools to improve employee productivity.

HR, Facilities Management & Technology Will Redesign Workspaces in 2024

38%
Deploy videoconferencing solutions for meeting spaces

33%
Act on employee feedback on how to improve experience

32%
Provide ongoing guidance on remote working best practices

31%
Increase physical interactions with managers

28%
Deploy large screen monitors for remote work

25%
Implement room booking apps

24%
Reduce dedicated seating to set up more 'hot desks'

24%
Improve collaboration/ productivity tools

Q: How does your organisation aim to improve employee experience in the next 12 months?
N=126
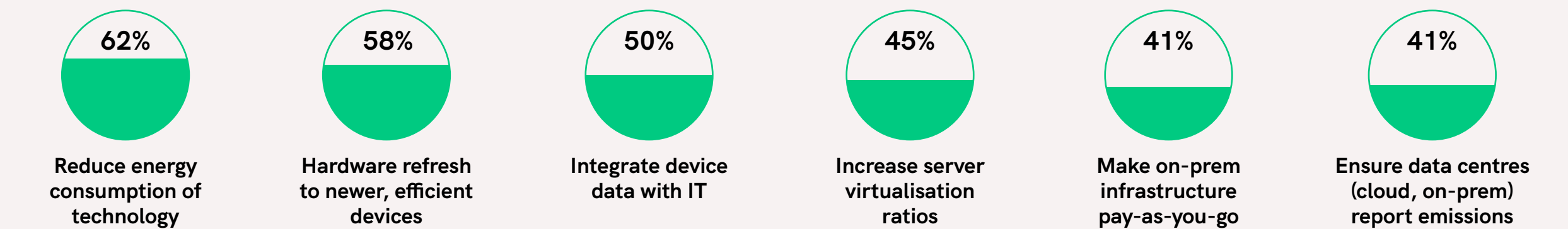*Source: Ecosystm Voice of the Employee Study, 2024*

#3 Achieving Sustainability Goals with Always-On Networks

53% of organisations in Australia feel that their employees are the most vocal advocates of sustainability in their organisations.

Ecosystm State of Enterprise ESG Adoption Study, 2024

Net-zero strategies will impact talent attraction, particularly among the younger workforce in Australia. As technology use, and its carbon footprint rises, forward-thinking organisations are reshaping workplaces by focusing on reducing the energy consumption of technology infrastructure and through automation in facilities.

### Actions Taken to Reduce Carbon Footprint by IT Teams in Australia

62%	58%	50%	45%	41%	41%
Reduce energy consumption of technology	Hardware refresh to newer, efficient devices	Integrate device data with IT	Increase server virtualisation ratios	Make on-prem infrastructure pay-as-you-go	Ensure data centres (cloud, on-prem) report emissions

Q: What actions does your IT team take to reduce their carbon footprint?
N=165
Source: Ecosystm State of Enterprise ESG Adoption Study, 2024
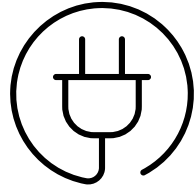
Reducing Tech Energy Consumption

Improvements in on-prem infrastructure energy consumption can be achieved through power management, effective data centre cooling, and server virtualisation. Investing in newer, more efficient equipment often pays off through energy savings. Cloud adoption can further help reduce carbon footprint, as cloud data centres are optimised for lower power usage effectiveness (PUE) ratios. Cloud hyperscalers are also making green commitments, using renewable energy sources like wind and solar through direct investments and power purchase agreements (PPAs) in Australia.
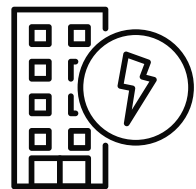
Facilities Automation

To build a more sustainable workplace, facilities management can cut emissions by optimising energy usage in HVAC and lighting. Advanced sensors for precise measurements of temperature, air quality, and lighting enhance efficiency. LAN-based occupancy data enables smart adaptation of building automation systems to dynamic spaces. As connected building automation systems become more prevalent, demanding always-on networks, integration, security, and resilience across LAN, WAN, SD-WAN, and SSE are crucial for employee comfort and sustainability.

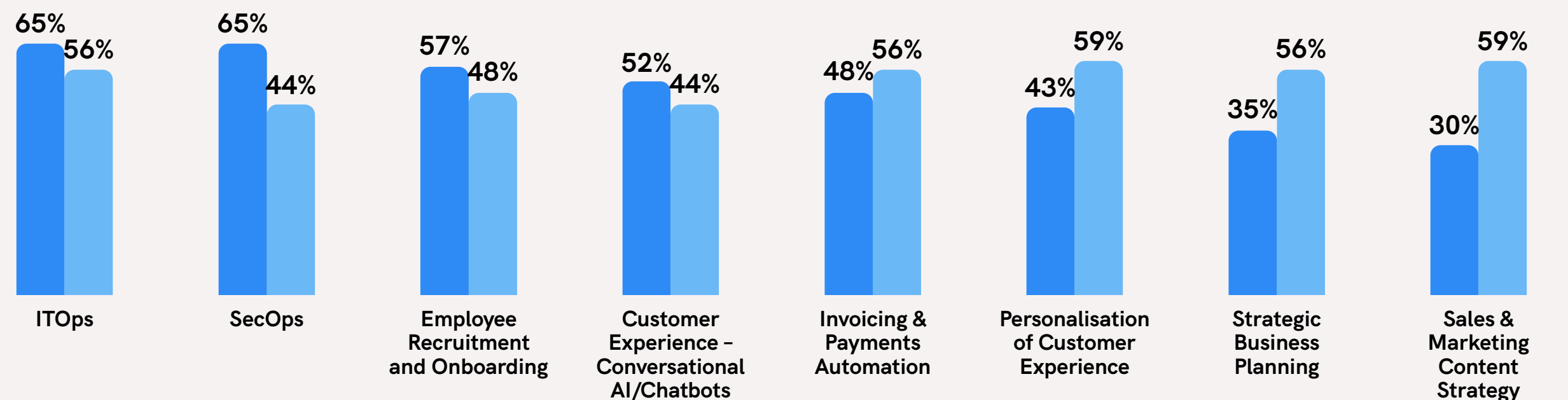# #4 Hybrid Agility: Supercharged by Software-Defined, Cloud Solutions

Digital transformation is poised to accelerate, with organisations embracing advanced technologies such as Generative AI, machine learning, and automation to streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and drive innovation.

Process and workflow automation will eliminate much of the manual tasks, freeing employees for creative and impactful work. AI assistants will handle tasks such as notetaking, document summarisation, and code debugging, enhancing efficiency. Bots, powered by private LLMs, will integrate into user-facing software like office applications, CRM systems, and IDEs. The surge of low-code tools will also empower business users to create innovative applications without relying on technology teams.

Driven by the imperative for efficiency, organisations will require scalable, software-defined, consumption-based IT infrastructure to stay competitive. Given the compute-intensive nature of many AI applications, harnessing GPU power from the cloud becomes crucial. Network and cloud automation are indispensable to ensure the organisation's ability to innovate at the same pace as AI.

Organisations in Australia will Increase Focus on AI Use Cases in 2024

Small and medium enterprises will prioritise AI business applications, while large organisations focus on empowering their technology teams with AI.

	Enterprises	SMEs
ITOps	65%	56%
SecOps	65%	44%
Employee Recruitment and Onboarding	57%	48%
Customer Experience – Conversational AI/Chatbots	52%	44%
Invoicing & Payments Automation	48%	56%
Personalisation of Customer Experience	43%	59%
Strategic Business Planning	35%	56%
Sales & Marketing Content Strategy	30%	59%

Q: Where will your organisation increase the use of AI in 2023-24?
N=65 (SMEs: Less than 500 employees/ Enterprises: 500 or more employees)
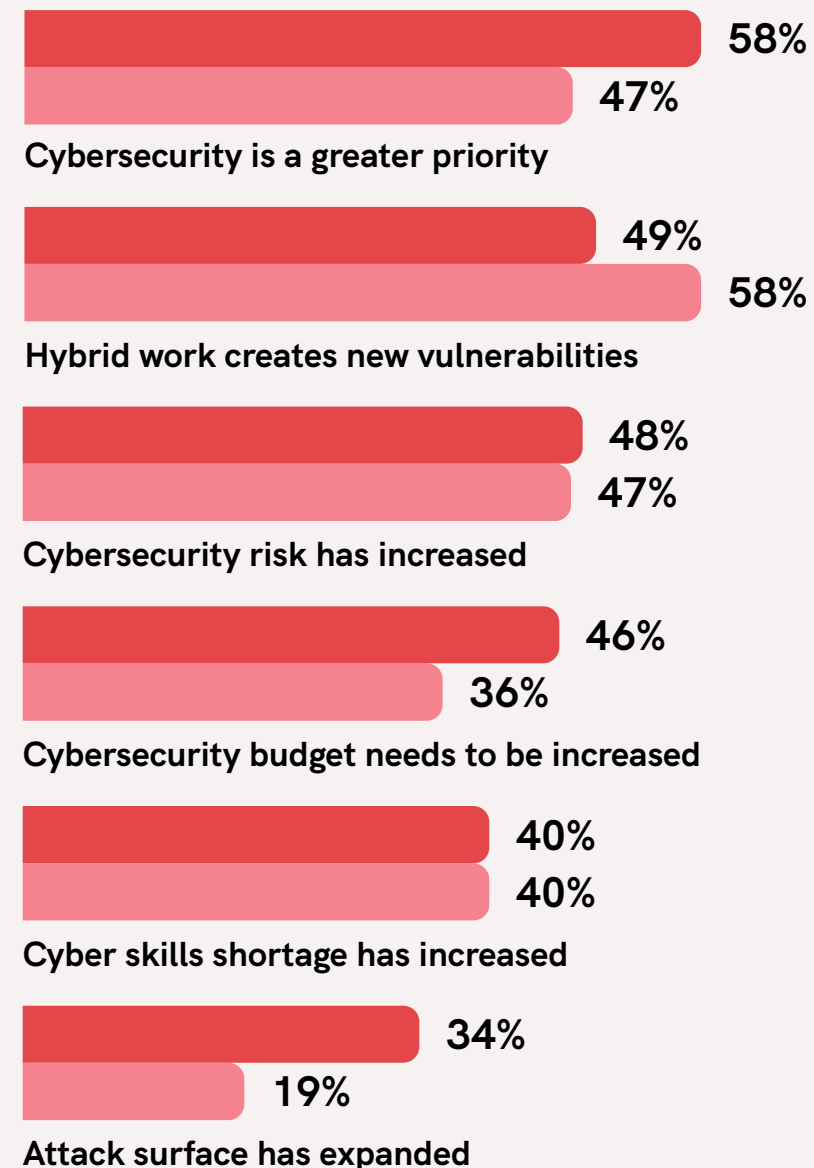*Source: Ecosystm Digital Enterprise Study, 2024*

#5

Strategic Shifts: Enhancing Data Privacy and Security Posture for Hybrid Work

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, concerns about data privacy and security will persist. Organisations will continue to invest in robust cybersecurity measures, employee training on cyber hygiene, and compliance with data protection regulations. Ensuring that sensitive information is handled securely in transit and at rest will be crucial for maintaining trust with employees and clients.

While many organisations have successfully implemented cybersecurity training and testing to reduce inadvertent insider threats, emerging workplace tools can create new risks. Generative AI is advancing beyond the experimental stage and will gain greater adoption by knowledge workers. Untrained users may be tempted to employ the emerging tool in ways that expose sensitive data, such as source code or personally identifiable information (PII). While employee training on responsible use is imperative, advancements in data loss prevention (DLP) tools will safeguard data while allowing organisations to benefit from advances in AI.

Views of Australia's Technology Leaders on the Impact of Hybrid Work on Cybersecurity

Small and medium enterprises perceive hybrid work as a bigger threat than larger organisations with greater resources to prioritise cyber investments.

58% / **47%**
Cybersecurity is a greater priority

49% / **58%**
Hybrid work creates new vulnerabilities

48% / **47%**
Cybersecurity risk has increased

46% / **36%**
Cybersecurity budget needs to be increased

40% / **40%**
Cyber skills shortage has increased

34% / **19%**
Attack surface has expanded

■ *Enterprises*   ■ *SMEs*

Data represents percentage of participants who agreed with the statements
N=204 (SMEs: Less than 500 employees/ Enterprises: 500 or more employees)
Source: Ecosystm Cybersecurity Study, 2024

Steps to Enhance Security in the Hybrid Work Environment

Securing a modern network for the evolved workplace requires taking progressive steps to protect employees whether they are in the office, at home, or on the road.

○ Conduct regular audits to identify new use cases that can enhance the security posture of the organisation.

○ Optimise SD-WAN by integrating AIOps and using features like dynamic forward error correction and data deduplication.

○ Strengthen the security of the hybrid workforce through the adoption of a Zero Trust Network Access (ZTNA) approach.

○ Increase scalability and reduce the risk of lateral attacks on the network compared to traditional VPNs.

○ Replace on-prem proxies with a Secure Web Gateway (SWG) delivered from the cloud. This safeguards employees by filtering internet traffic and enforcing security policies, regardless of their location.

○ Implement a cloud access security broker (CASB) to increase visibility and enforce consistent policies across all cloud providers. This prevents data loss and helps to maintain compliance.

○ Reduce the number of vendors in the network and security stack to prevent functional overlap. Managing SSE modules from one console enables consistent policy enforcement across the entire network.

Ecosystm Opinion

The hybrid employee requires an always-on network that protects the user and sensitive data. For many organisations, managing the complexity that comes with a distributed workforce is challenging.

> A managed services provider with deep domain knowledge can simplify the deployment and administration of intelligent tools, such as SD-WAN and SSE.

The complex tasks of configuring security policies, dealing with ISP outages, and monitoring performance can be taken on and optimised by an experienced partner.

Shifting to a managed service model enables the transition from CapEx to OpEx and frees up valuable IT specialists to focus on higher value tasks. Additionally, consuming network and security functions from the cloud makes it possible to redeploy physical infrastructure and avoid complicated hardware refreshes.

The uncertainty that comes with trying to secure a dynamic workforce can be resolved by utilising the scalability of the cloud. Whether it is Together Tuesday or WFH Friday, cloud-based SD-WAN and SSE can cope with these fluctuations.
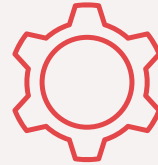
Connectivity of Today: The Nexon Cisco Synergy

Streamlining user experience for remote and campus environments

→ Integrate SD-WAN and SSE functionalities such as ZTNA, SWG, and CASB

→ Rapidly deploy and manage via managed services, filling any expertise or resource gaps

Enhancing operational efficiencies regardless of user locations

→ Reduce costs through elimination of multiple point products, hardware appliances, maintenance contracts, and operational overheads

→ Lower total cost of ownership through single-platform, per-user pricing models

Securing critical business applications

→ Ensure compliance by enforcing a uniform security policy across all edges: users, devices, and applications

→ Protect sensitive data from unauthorised access or viewing

→ Automate alerts for employees to enable informed decision-making, safeguarding the business from breaches

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About Ecosystm

Ecosystm is a Digital Research and Advisory Company with its global headquarters in Singapore. We bring together tech buyers, tech vendors and analysts onto one integrated platform to enable the best decisionmaking in the evolving digital economy. Ecosystm has moved away from the highly inefficient business models of traditional research firms and instead focuses on research democratisation, with an emphasis on accessibility, transparency, and autonomy. Ecosystm's broad portfolio of advisory services is provided by a team of Analysts from a variety of backgrounds that include career analysts, CIOs and business leaders, and domain experts with decades of experience in their field. Visit ecosystm.io

About Nexon

Nexon Asia Pacific (Nexon) is an award-winning digital consulting and managed services partner for mid-market and government organisations across Australia. We have a uniquely broad suite of solutions to service clients who require end-to-end capabilities coupled with specialist expertise in security, cloud, and digital solutions.

Our end-to-end solutions help clients to solve problems, address frictions, and accelerate growth. Committed to the highest standards of responsiveness, competency, and transparency, Nexon is built on a unique client care model that is fuelled by continuous feedback. With 500+ staff, we employ some of the country's most experienced consultants and empower teams to make decisions that accelerate change for client organisations.

As a certified and accredited local and state government provider, CREST, and ISO-certified, Nexon partners with world-class technology vendors to deliver innovative solutions and service excellence.

We help our clients move from a position of overwhelm to empowerment, looking forward to a more agile and digital future.

nexon.com.au

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Cisco (Nasdaq: CSCO) is the worldwide technology leader that securely connects everything to make anything possible. Our purpose is to power an inclusive future for all by helping our customers reimagine their applications, power hybrid work, secure their enterprise, transform their infrastructure, and meet their sustainability goals. Discover more at newsroom.cisco.com.