Spark nz

Lifting productivity: Moving New Zealand from getting by to getting ahead

A survey of Kiwi businesses

Foreword

New Zealand's productivity challenge is old news – we've heard the statistics, read the reports and listened to the commentary. But here's what struck me when I read the results of Spark's recent survey of Kiwi businesses: two-thirds agree productivity is a national problem, yet three-quarters believe they're ahead of their competitors.[1]

This mindset matters. It suggests we might be measuring ourselves against the wrong benchmarks, or perhaps we're not measuring the right things at all. If so, are Kiwi businesses missing out on productivity gains that could transform their operations, their profits and, collectively, our economy?

At Spark, we see this challenge from a unique vantage point. We work alongside thousands of New Zealand businesses, from small businesses to large corporates, helping them leverage technology to work smarter. We've witnessed first-hand how the right digital tools, properly integrated, can unlock remarkable productivity gains. We've also seen how technology alone isn't the complete answer – it needs to be paired with the right mindset, skills and willingness to improve in the right areas.

This report moves beyond the familiar macro-economic analysis to explore what Kiwi businesses truly think about productivity, identify the gaps and provide practical steps to close them. Throughout, we share real-world examples of how Spark's solutions are helping organisations improve their productivity, along with case studies of innovative Kiwi organisations using smart solutions to drive efficiency in their sectors.

Our findings reveal both encouraging signs and uncomfortable truths. Most businesses plan to invest in technology over the next three years, but many struggle to integrate basic tools like cloud computing. They recognise the value of external expertise, yet barriers around knowledge, cost and change resistance persist.

The opportunity is substantial. As this research shows, businesses that invest in the right technology – and take advantage of expert advice to guide their choices – will not only improve their own performance but also help lift our entire economy.

The tools exist and the expertise is available. What's needed now is a collective shift from "getting by" to "getting ahead", and the courage to take concrete action. I hope this report provides both the wake-up call and practical advice to help make that shift.

Matt Bain

Chief Technology and AI Officer

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Research summary

A total of **397 New Zealand business leaders** were surveyed in August 2025 to understand how Kiwi businesses view productivity in the context of their own business.

Detailed findings are in the report, but an overview of our key findings are outlined below.

66% of Kiwi Businesses surveyed agree that productivity is a problem for business within New Zealand.

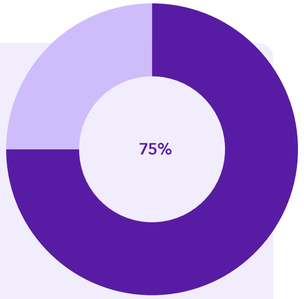
83% recognise the need for process improvements in their own business.

Despite the overwhelming majority of business leaders recognising the need for improvement when it comes to productivity in their own business, **75%** of survey respondents **believe they're ahead of their nearest rivals** when it comes to **adopting streamlined and efficient processes**.

There are differences in the metrics and methods businesses use to assess their own productivity performance.

- **33% of businesses** are **using profit** and **customer satisfaction ratings** as an **indicator of productivity**, and
- **24% are suggesting** that **productivity improvements** are **related to time savings** and **process improvements.**

75%
of businesses agree that applying new technologies could deliver significant productivity gains for their business.



39% are already investing in technology products and services to drive improvements in their current processes.

77% indicate they will invest in IT and tech products and services to boost productivity or support innovation in the next three years.

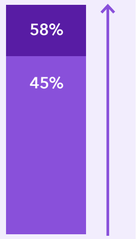
There is a big opportunity for Kiwi businesses to adopt new technologies, as currently only **46% say they have fully** or **partially integrated cloud infrastructure** within their operations, and just **29% are experimenting with AI tools**.

When asked what's stopping business leaders from adopting and integrating new technologies:

- **42%** say they're struggling with a lack of knowledge or expertise
- **40%** find the cost of new technology a barrier
- **38%** say a lack of access to necessary capital is hindering their investment
- **36%** believe this is due to a resistance to change.

Along with technology, staff training and development is also recognised as key to improving productivity, with **36%** of businesses surveyed **stating that this is their most important investment to improve efficiency.**

45% of Kiwi businesses recognise the **need for external expertise to maximise the benefits of adopting new technology.** This **increases to 58%** amongst those organisations with **more than 100 full-time employees.**



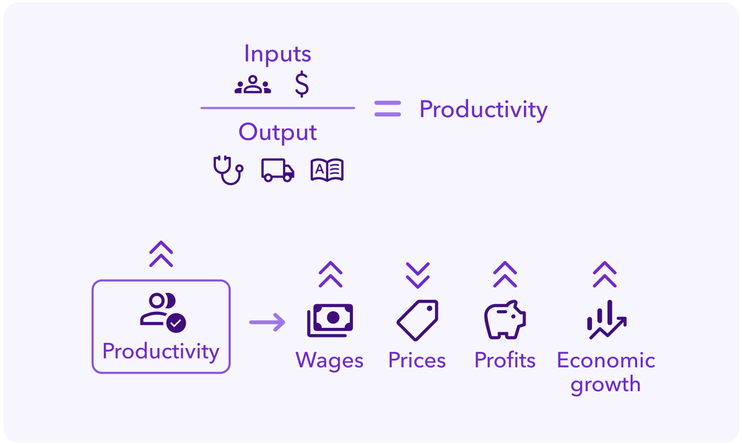
SECTION 1

Sharpening the focus on productivity

Shaking off productivity complacency requires looking harder at performance.

New Zealand's low productivity has been well documented.[2] Our nation's lower-than-average output per hour worked, compared to other OECD countries, is a gap that continues to widen, contributing to lower GDP and incomes, further denting the national psyche.

A report by Spark and NZIER[3] published in 2024 explains how better use of technology could boost productivity and transition New Zealanders to smarter ways of working. In this report, we've shifted our focus to better understand how Kiwi businesses view productivity, and the steps they can take to improve. The findings are based on a survey of 397 New Zealand business leaders, commissioned by Spark and conducted by Clemenger Group in August 2025.[4]



"Work smarter, not harder"

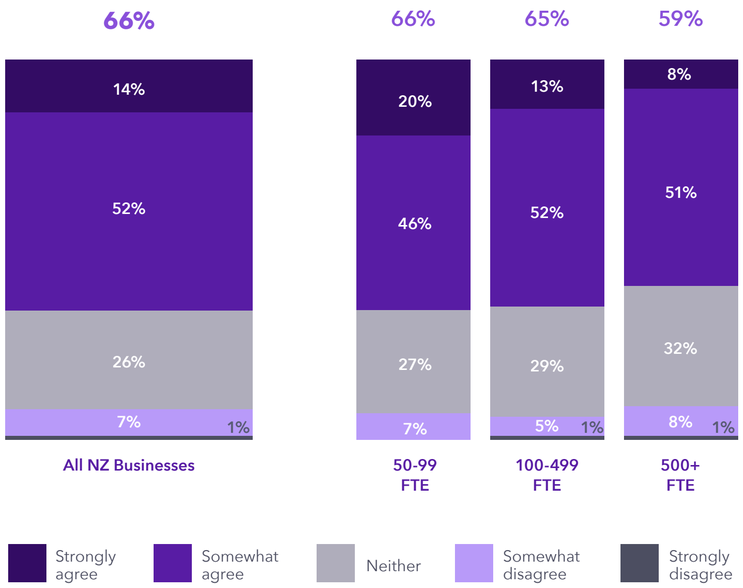
The phrase is overused, but it's an important one. Growth comes from additional labour (or making current employees work longer hours, which New Zealand excels at), more capital or from using labour and capital more effectively. The latter is seen in generational innovations which New Zealand has produced in the past. A well-known example is the world's first mechanised milking machine, invented by Wairarapa farmer Norman John Daysh[5], which formed the basis of modern milking machines.

Kiwi businesses aren't hiding from the reality

The majority of businesses are aware that New Zealand organisations could be more productive or efficient. Our research shows that two-thirds (66%) of Kiwi businesses agree that productivity is a problem for businesses in New Zealand.

Further, the research shows that most business decision-makers believe better productivity is important, with 83% recognising the need for process improvements in their business.

Majority agree productivity is a problem in NZ

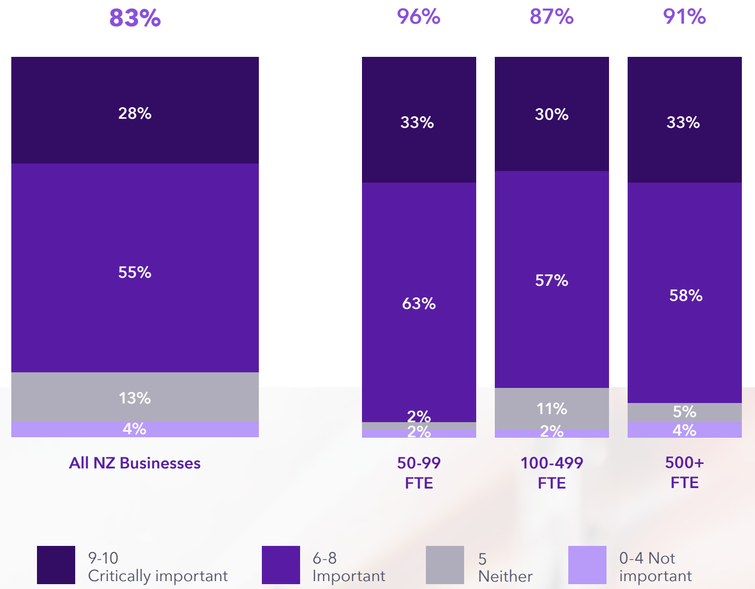


Q Recently there have been official reports and media stories saying that New Zealand businesses could be more productive or efficient.

To what extent do you agree that productivity/efficiency is a problem for NZ businesses in general?

> *There are a lot of manual processes and multiple people involved in processes that shouldn't need so many.*
> (50-99 FTE, Primary sector)

Most recognise the need for further improvement

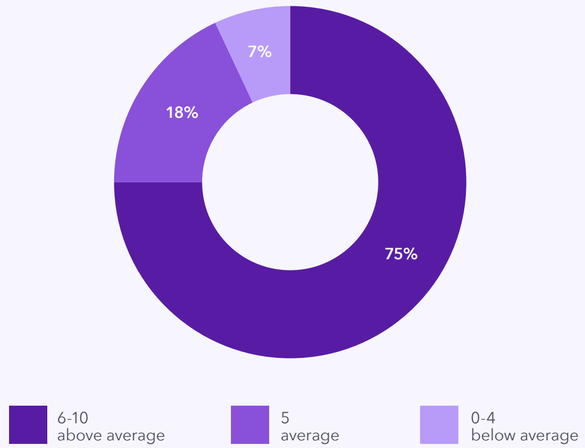


Q To what extent do you think it is important that your business improve its current processes?

How businesses view productivity

Despite most business leaders recognising the need for improvement when it comes to productivity, the research also found that three-quarters (75%) believe they're ahead of their nearest rivals when it comes to adopting streamlined and efficient processes. This suggests that many businesses remain confident in their own productivity, even when official statistics suggest otherwise. This disconnect may be due to confusion about what constitutes high productivity, or differences in the metrics and methods businesses use to assess their performance compared to those used in official reports.

Most believe they are more productive than average



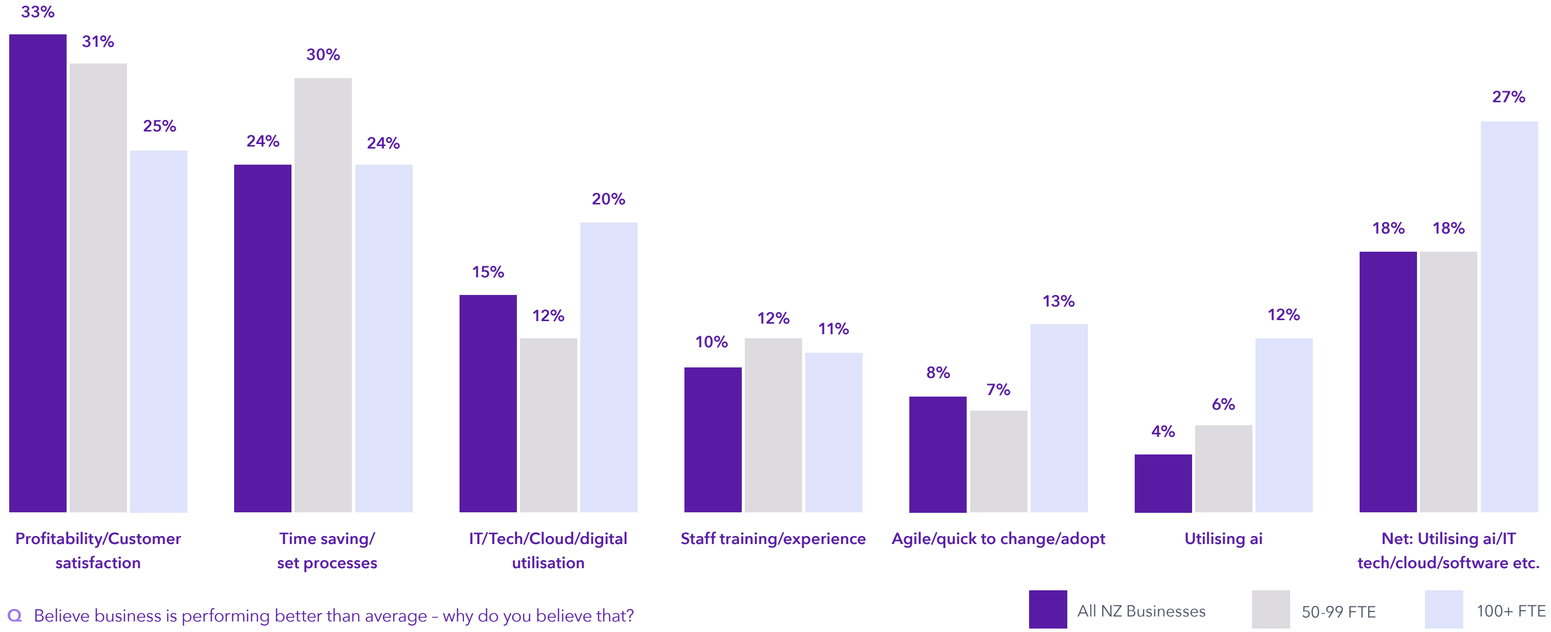
Q How do you think your business compares to other businesses of the same type/ industry for its adoption of streamlined processes and time saving solutions that help the business be more efficient?

For example, one-third (33%) of businesses point to profit and customer satisfaction ratings as an indicator of productivity, whereas less than one-quarter (24%) suggest that productivity improvements are related to time savings and process improvements. By conflating customer and profit measures with productivity, businesses discourage more accurate appraisals of performance and how it could be improved. In essence, the mindset suggests that if we're making money and our customers are happy, then we must be efficient.

Interestingly, larger businesses (100 + FTE) are significantly more likely to see technology and the adoption of AI as a driver of efficiency than smaller businesses (27% versus 18%).

> *New Zealand businesses have less belief in technology. Attitudes of employees is also a factor.*
> (100+ FTE, Tertiary sector)

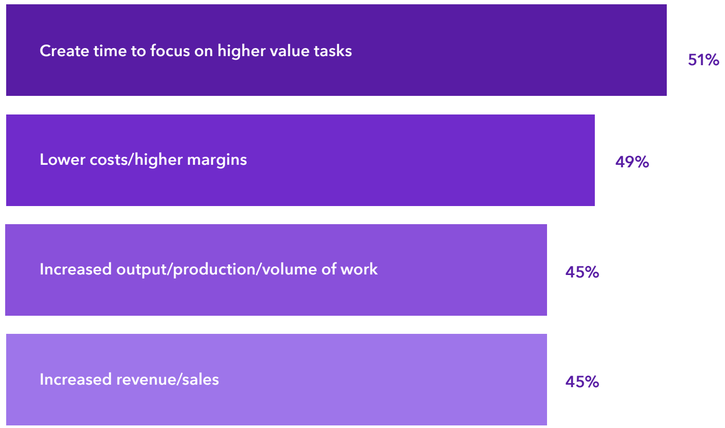
Many assume that business profitability/customer satisfaction indicates efficiency



Q Believe business is performing better than average – why do you believe that?

Our research also shows that many businesses don't recognise the real value of improved efficiency to their business.

Many businesses don't recognise the real value of improved efficiency.



Q What do you see as the benefits for your business of introducing streamlined processes and adopting new technology?

Productivity complacency

New Zealand's business environment may inadvertently encourage productivity complacency. In a relatively small market, businesses can continue to operate, despite certain inefficiencies. Geographic isolation has also historically provided natural protection from more efficient international competitors[6], allowing less productive operations to survive.

New Zealand's remote location and relatively small size also offer limited opportunities for business owners to observe highly efficient operators in other countries. Without this broader view of productivity and related benchmarks, there could be a tendency to believe that current practices are sufficient, even if greater improvements might be possible.

The problem: "Productivity complacency has a neuroscience explanation: it's rooted in how our brains respond to uncertainty and change. When businesses are anxious about AI disruption or competitive pressures, people switch to a fight-or-flight state. In this state, critical thinking suffers, innovation drops, and decision-making becomes reactive rather than strategic. This is a hidden productivity killer."

The solution: "The solution isn't just about adopting new technology; it's about what I call 'cognitive upsizing.' When businesses implement AI or automation to handle routine tasks, the instinct is often to treat efficiency gains as a bonus. But cognition is like a muscle: if it's not used, it will atrophy. Businesses need to immediately fill productivity gains with more complex, human-centred challenges—bigger problems, more strategic initiatives, deeper innovation."

– Professor Joel Pearson

Reframing productivity as competitive advantage

What could convince Kiwi businesses to take productivity more seriously? Our survey suggests many businesses, especially smaller ones, don't recognise the real value of improved efficiency.

How we think about productivity matters. Kiwi businesses need to consider a change of mindset that reframes productivity as competitive advantage, not just time savings or cost-cutting. Productivity is an investment in business prosperity and an essential contributor to lifting the economy and the country's prosperity. Businesses and workers respond better to "how can we improve?" than "how can we fix our problems?" This style of thinking shifts productivity from a reactive mindset to a proactive strategy.

"New Zealand businesses excel at the 'number 8 wire' mentality – creative problem-solving with limited resources. The key is to channel this ingenuity into structured productivity improvement. Don't be risk-averse with new tools; embrace them with proper human support and change management."

Professor Joel Pearson

Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, University of NSW
Founder of the Future Minds Lab
Speaker at Spark Accelerate 25

For information on Professor Joel Pearson's book, see **here**[7]

SECTION 2

Productivity in action – Spark case studies

PRIVATE 5G

Spark and Air New Zealand trial NZ's first private 5G network

Spark trialled a drone tethered to an autonomous ground robot at Air New Zealand's 5,000 square metre logistics warehouse at Auckland Airport. The aim was to demonstrate the capabilities of private 5G networks in complex operational environments. The deployment showcased how private 5G can enable advanced automation applications, with the network supporting real-time remote operation and health monitoring of autonomous equipment as it scanned inventory throughout the warehouse.

> "It's about rethinking how we manage complex environments, like our logistics warehouse, to improve the way we work. We're excited about the possibilities this technology unlocks for the future of our airline."
> – Nikhil Ravishankar, Air New Zealand Chief Digital Officer (now Chief Executive)

> "Pilots like our Private 5G project with Air New Zealand are essential for proving business value before full-scale deployment. They allow us to demonstrate how reliable, high-performance connectivity can enable automation applications in challenging environments where traditional WiFi struggles. This pilot validated that Private 5G can support autonomous systems in complex warehouses, delivering measurable improvements in operational efficiency while gathering the data needed to build compelling business cases for broader network and automation investments."
> – Michele Wong, IoT Lead at Spark

SATELLITE

Vehicle-based satellite revolutionises rural healthcare

In Wairoa, Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora Hawke's Bay workers – from district nurses to midwives to physiotherapists – stay connected, no matter what. With Starlink's high-speed internet, delivered by Spark, they maintain crucial access to patient information and virtual support, ensuring top-notch care across one of the country's most remote and vulnerable regions.

> "If we have another cyclone, where both ends of the fibre are cut, Wairoa's got nothing. We're not going to let that happen again. Starlink means staff can still make calls and log on to our private network to access the systems they need."
> – Sym Gardiner, Data and Digital Lead Service Improvement Analyst, Health New Zealand Hawke's Bay.

> "Satellite connectivity in vehicles gives healthcare workers the reliability they need to serve vulnerable populations. It's a powerful reminder that true productivity requires resilient connectivity, especially in regions where geography works against you."
> – Karyn Pulley, Networks & Security Lead at Spark

Learn more

AI VOICEBOT

AI voicebots deliver operational improvements to Kiwibank

Kiwibank customers are calling more often, with more complex questions. AI voicebots help the bank's customers get answers faster. Working with Spark to create custom AI voicebots directly within its Genesys environment, the bank has streamlined its self-service processes, delivered operational improvements and enhanced customer experience (CX). Abandonment rates slashed by 28% || Average speed of answer reduced by 49% || Average handle time decreased by 19% || Transfer rates lowered by 27%.

> "To me, simplicity is actually the hero in Kiwibank's case. They used the opportunity of technology change to ditch unnecessary complexity."
> – Ramon Szeitszam, Voice & Collaboration Lead at Spark

Learn more

CLOUD

Cloud-managed network transforms campus connectivity at Queenstown Resort College

Queenstown Resort College (QRC) was managing bespoke internet connectivity across multiple campus sites that was expensive to run and required lots of oversight. Students needed different login details at different locations, and IT staff spent significant time processing password requests and managing user accounts manually across four student intakes per year.

Working with Spark, QRC implemented Cisco Meraki's cloud-managed network platform, creating seamless campus-wide connectivity that largely runs itself. The solution is integrated with QRC's student management system, automating user profile creation, login assignment and account deactivation, dramatically reducing administrative workload while delivering enterprise-grade security and performance.

> "The network takes care of itself and that's a big deal. We now have seamless single sign-on across all campus sites, and automated user onboarding and offboarding for four annual intakes. We just physically could not have done that before."
> – Malcolm Davies, IT Manager, Queenstown Resort College

"The best productivity technology is the kind you stop thinking about. QRC's network takes care of itself – and that's the goal. When your infrastructure runs seamlessly in the background, your people can focus on what matters: in QRC's case, delivering outstanding education. We're delighted that our Central Otago Business Hub could help bring this solution to QRC."
– Jared Dixon, SME Collaboration & Emerging Tech lead

Learn more

SECTION 3

Balancing human and technology investment

Businesses expect technology to boost productivity but invest more heavily in people. You need to invest in both.

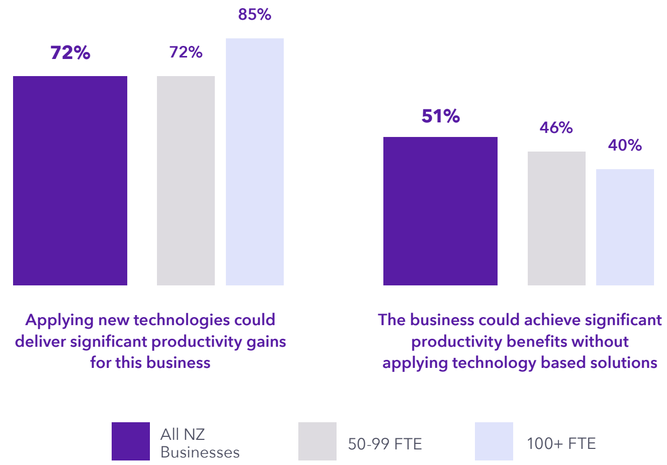
The role of technology as an enabler

Most businesses generally agree that technology plays an important role in achieving productivity improvements for their business. Three-quarters agree with the statement that applying new technologies could deliver significant productivity gains for their business (75%). The research also shows that current investment in IT/technology differentiates the most productive businesses. Across all New Zealand businesses surveyed, 39% said they were already investing in IT/tech products and services to drive improvement in current processes, but this rises to 48% of businesses who rate their business productivity highly (9 or 10).

Staff development and training is also important

But as much as technology is recognised for its potential to drive productivity, businesses are also focusing on other areas – particularly staff training and development. In fact, over one-third of businesses (36%) state that this is their most important investment to improve efficiency. Current investment in staff training and development and IT/tech & new software have similar levels of investment technology (62% vs 57%).

The role of technology solutions for productivity gains



Q To what extent you agree or disagree with these statements about productivity and your business? Top 2 box agreement shown

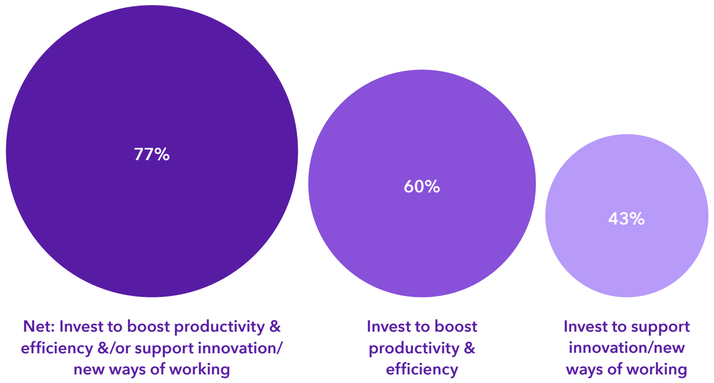
> *There is much lower use of technology and innovation [in New Zealand] to automate or enhance business processes*
> (50-99 FTE, Fourth sector)

Future investment in technology

However, these priorities may change in the future given that more than three-quarters of Kiwi businesses (77%) indicate they will be investing in IT and tech products and services to boost productivity or support innovation in the next three years. 43% of New Zealand businesses say they want to invest to support innovation or new ways of working.

There is indeed an opportunity to adopt new technologies. Currently only 46% have fully or partially integrated cloud infrastructure and just under a third (29%) are experimenting with AI tools. There is also huge opportunity to implement IoT, Computer Vision or Robotics.

Productivity and innovation are key for those investing in IT & tech products and services

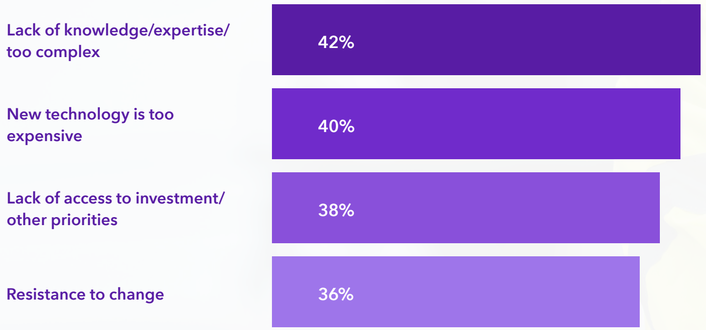


Q Thinking about the next 1 to 3 years, which of the following reflect your business's outlook on investment in IT & tech products & services?

Barriers to integration

But how much of this investment comes to fruition will depend on how over half of all businesses can overcome moderate or significant barriers (55%). Right now, they're struggling with a lack of knowledge/expertise (42%), the price of new technology (40%), lack of access to necessary capital (38%) and resistance to change (36%).

Barriers to adopting streamlined processes/new tech



Q What are the main barriers constraining your business from adopting streamlined processes and new technologies?

> *We are pretty laid back as a country and tall poppy syndrome impacts us.*
> (50-99 FTE, Fourth sector)

Expert help can make a big difference

Almost half (45%) of Kiwi businesses recognise they would need external expertise to maximise the benefits of adopting new technology, increasing to 58% amongst those organisations 100+ FTE. This also varies by sector, with just 29% of the primary sector verses 48% of the tertiary sector.

External providers, like Spark, clearly have a role to play. They directly tackle the most significant barrier, which is lack of knowledge or expertise (mentioned by 42% of all New Zealand businesses), by offering specialised skills that are often scarce in the local market. Spark brings deep technical expertise across emerging technologies like AI, cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity and digital transformation frameworks. This is particularly valuable for smaller businesses that can't justify hiring full-time specialists, or larger organisations that require expertise beyond their current capabilities.

And most importantly, external providers help ensure technology investments can deliver their intended benefits. They bring implementation expertise that reduces the risk of failed deployments, best practice knowledge from working across multiple organisations and industries, and ongoing support and optimisation to ensure technologies continue delivering value over time, rather than becoming underused investments.

COMMENTARY

Professor Rod McNaughton, University of Auckland Business School.

As an entrepreneurship educator and researcher, I approach productivity from the perspective of how firms grow and scale. Productivity is not only a macroeconomic concern; it is a micro-level capability challenge that unfolds in the everyday decisions firms make about how they organise, learn and lead.

The most productive firms are not necessarily those inventing new tools, but those that know how to use them well. They combine disciplined management, data-driven decision-making, repeatable processes and the capacity to adapt and scale. Many New Zealand firms struggle here, not through lack of entrepreneurial energy, but because our ecosystem has not consistently supported the development of mature managerial and scaling capability.

The **IMF**[8] has shown that New Zealand's productivity problem is also structural: too much capital still flows to property and low-productivity sectors, and too little to firms that innovate and compete internationally. These imbalances constrain what even capable managers can achieve. Yet within those constraints, firms that invest in managerial learning and scaling know-how perform better. Sustainable productivity growth depends on both the competence of business leaders and the strength of the environment that enables them to turn resources into results.

This report highlights an important mindset issue: many firms equate productivity with profit or customer satisfaction, rather than with how effectively they use people, capital and knowledge. Reframing productivity as a capability challenge, something that can be learned and improved, turns an abstract national problem into a practical, firm-level opportunity. When businesses see productivity in the language of capability, profitability and growth, they can better understand how their actions contribute to national performance.

High-growth "gazelle" firms have an important role, but they represent only a small share of any economy, and their exponential growth is seldom sustainable. The larger opportunity lies in the thousands of firms that grow steadily but linearly. Small, compounding improvements in capability and process across this broad base will do more to lift national productivity than focusing on the few exceptional performers.

Technology can accelerate that progress, but it is not a substitute for capability. Productivity growth will not come from more software licences alone; it will come from more sophisticated leadership guided by entrepreneurial and growth-oriented mindsets that align strategy, people and capital to deliver enduring performance gains.

Ultimately, productivity is a question of capability before capital, and of leadership before tools. The firms that learn to scale intelligently, lead strategically and invest deliberately in their people will define the next generation of New Zealand's economic growth.

For a previous article by Professor Rod McNaughton, see **here**[9]

SECTION 4

Moving from productivity complacency to competitive advantage

Facing up to the productivity challenge

Solving the productivity challenge

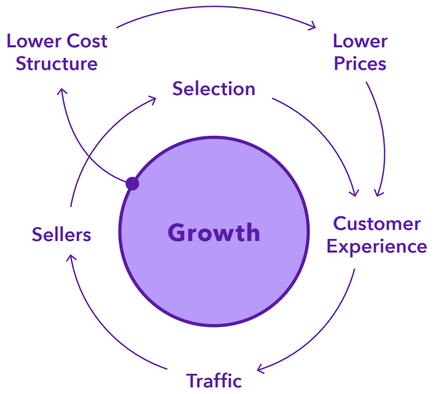
New Zealand businesses stand at a critical juncture[10]. By accurately measuring their operational efficiency and strategically integrating technology with external expertise, individual companies can unlock significant productivity gains. These improvements will not only strengthen their competitive position but also collectively drive broader economic growth across the country.[11]

The tools, expertise and financial models to improve our productivity exist. What's needed now is a shift in mindset – from "getting by" to "getting ahead." Businesses must have the courage to step out of their comfort zones and work with digital experts to make the most of the efficiency opportunities offered by digital technology.

New Zealand businesses need to reframe technology investment as competitive necessity, not optional upgrade. With only 16% of businesses fully integrating even basic cloud infrastructure, early movers have substantial advantage. For example, IDC forecasts indicate that New Zealand's public cloud spend will nearly double from $5 billion in 2024 to $9.6 billion by 2028, contributing over $24 billion in new revenue in the next four years.[12]

The Amazon flywheel

Productivity isn't a destination - it's a virtuous loop: strategic investments enhance operations, which boost customer satisfaction, which drives sales growth and profitability, which in turn funds further improvements. This self-reinforcing cycle transforms productivity from a one-time goal into an ongoing competitive advantage. A well-known example is the Amazon Flywheel, the strategic business model developed by Jeff Bezos to drive Amazon's growth. Each component of the business strengthens the others, creating momentum to accelerate improvements across the entire business. As improvements are made, the benefits are reintroduced into the business, driving further improvements in its operation.



Productivity solvers – NZ case studies

Halter

Halter's virtual fencing and pasture management technology enables farmers to remotely contain, herd and monitor the location and health of their livestock.

What's the problem? Most farmers walk behind their cows to move them between paddocks. It takes up a heap of time. Physical fences have to be moved constantly. Other struggles include getting the most out of their pasture, detecting animal health issues early and managing grazing evenly across their farm.

Problem solved: Halter's solar-powered smart collars use GPS tracking and sound and vibration-based training to guide livestock movement – something they call Virtual Fencing and Pasture Management. The system runs with the help of AI, utilising software dubbed the "Cowgorithm," to train and manage each animal individually through cues. Farmers use an app to set virtual boundaries, schedule paddock shifts and monitor individual animal behaviour and health metrics, including heat detection, rumination and in-calf rates.

Productivity gains: The impact on farm operations is substantial. One Southland farmer reported saving over 2.5 hours daily by streamlining cow movement to the milking shed, while also increasing milk solids by 10,000kg a season and significantly reducing nitrogen use. Farmers across the Waikato have reported improved herd management, better pasture growth, reduced working hours and enhanced cow health, including reduced stress and lameness. On average, Halter farmers save 27.5 hours a week. In some New Zealand regions, approximately 30% of farmers now use Halter collars – strong validation of its productivity prowess.

Colin Espiner, Strategic Communications Director:

> "At Halter, we're all about raising productivity. We enable farmers to grow and harvest more grass, run more sustainable farms and protect animal welfare. Our mission is to be the leading operating system for farms and ranches, and we're proud of our NZ-grown, world-leading technology built on farm-fuelled grit, innovative spirit and the belief that farmers deserve the best tools to help them feed the world.''

Halter collars virtually fence and shift cattle, monitor animal health and enable precision pasture management

LawVu

LawVu is an AI-powered legal workspace that centralises matter, contract and spend management for in-house legal teams.

What's the problem? 77% of in-house legal teams lose over an hour each day switching between disconnected systems to do their work. Fragmented workflows, manual administrative tasks and poor visibility across legal matters and contracts make it difficult for teams to work efficiently and strategically. Add in informal requests and scattered emails and information easily slips through the cracks.

Problem solved: LawVu unifies teams in a single platform, unlocking rich data and efficiencies that empower legal to deliver exceptional service and business outcomes across more than 20 industries, including technology, finance, healthcare and education.

Built-in AI tools automatically extract key contract clauses and data, while natural language processing reviews and summarises contracts in seconds, identifying parties, key dates, liabilities, warranties and renewal dates.

Productivity gains: In-house legal teams using LawVu report saving more than two hours per team member each week on administrative work, with contract turnaround times reduced by 45%. These gains add up to an average return on investment of over 300% – freeing up lawyers to focus on higher-value, strategic initiatives and proactive business partnering. LawVu has an overall customer satisfaction score of 98.6%, with one customer calling it "the single most impactful tool" in their legal career.

> **"Corporate legal teams constantly face the challenge to do more with less. Our AI-enabled workspace is helping to accelerate productivity, reduce costs and eliminate repetitive, time-consuming tasks across so many areas within a legal team. Whether that's through contract negotiations, billing guideline reviews or automated intake, our focus is on enabling legal teams to move faster, stay in control and deliver real impact to the business."**
>
> – Sam Kidd, co-founder and CEO of LawVu

GARTNER RESEARCH

Maximize Employee Productivity by Overcoming 4 Emerging Myths

Research firm Gartner® finds in its recent report that despite increased C-suite focus on employee productivity to drive growth, a growing number of organisations are not meeting their productivity targets. Their research debunks four emerging productivity myths and shares actions that Human Resource leaders can take to help employees achieve their potential.

Business growth continues to be the number one priority for CEOs. But despite this focus, employee productivity remains an elusive target. The research suggests that Human Resource/People & Culture leaders have a key role to play in enabling employees to maximize their productivity potential. However, they must avoid falling prey to four emerging productivity myths as they adapt their HR strategies:

1. Productivity is not a core HR responsibility.
2. AI usage guarantees higher productivity.
3. On-site employees are more productive than hybrid employees.
4. Improving employee productivity requires more data and metrics.

"If Human Resource leaders can debunk these four myths and take the right actions a business can increase employee productivity by up to 35%," the Gartner, Inc. report states.[13]

The full Gartner, Inc. report 'Maximize Employee Productivity by Overcoming 4 Emerging Myths' has been made available for Spark Accelerate attendees for a limited time **here**.

Astute Access

Astute Access combines Bluetooth-enabled smart lock hardware with cloud-based software to enable keyless access control for organisations.

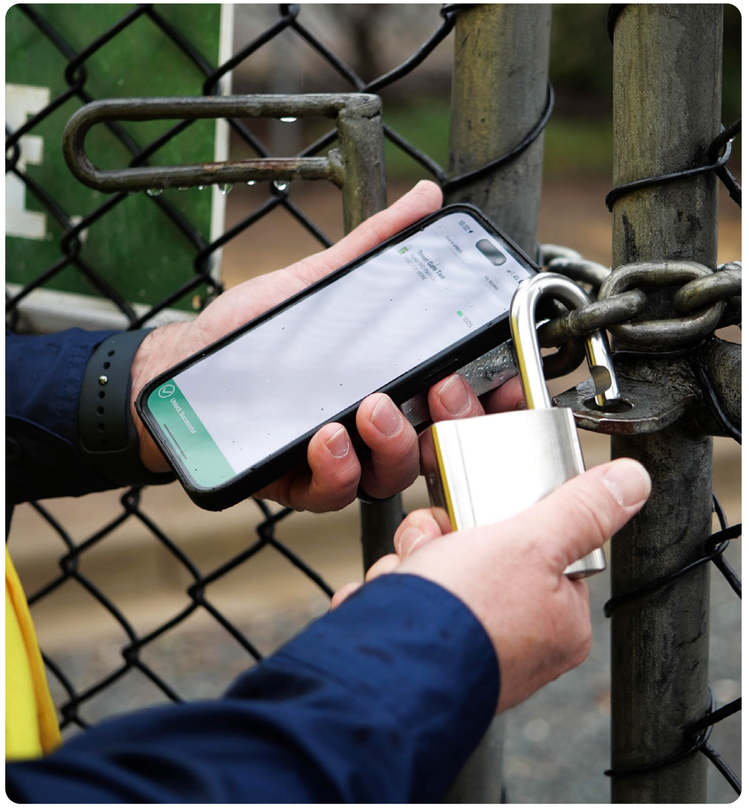
What's the problem? Using physical keys for critical infrastructure is woefully inefficient. Industries with high key management requirements, such as water utilities, power companies, telecommunications and rail networks manage hundreds – and sometimes thousands – of keys. Issuing and tracking keys can be a nightmare, creating massive administrative overhead, security risks from lost keys and patchy visibility of who accessed sites and when.

Problem solved: Astute Access's cloud platform – LockVue - provides users with a mobile app for controlled keyless entry to any Bluetooth-enabled locking hardware. The system sends alerts whenever a lock is unlocked, enabling real-time tracking of who accesses each site, acting as a digital punch card that streamlines access management. Administrators can grant and revoke access remotely, track all lock activity and maintain complete visibility across their entire network.

Productivity gains: Digitising mechanical locks represents a huge leap in operational efficiency. Time spent on managing physical keys is slashed, and security incidents from lost or stolen keys are eliminated. Major clients such as Wellington Water, Orion, easyStorage and Queensland Government have validated the productivity and security benefits of Astute Access's keyless access control. Their endorsement demonstrates its effectiveness in critical infrastructure site access management.

> **"Physical keys seem simple until you examine the workflow. Every lost key triggers a cascade of inefficiency: reporting, investigating, deciding whether to re-key, coordinating lock changes, issuing new keys, updating records. Then multiply that across hundreds of sites and a very large group of contractors. Our clients tell us the real productivity gain isn't about faster access - it's eliminating all that invisible administrative burden that was quietly draining resources."**
>
> – Nick Mooyman, founder and managing director, Astute Access

> *New Zealanders are not risk takers, we ignore the importance of technology.*
> (50-99 FTE, Primary sector)



Christchurch City Council Environmental Monitoring Sensor Network

Christchurch City Council's IoT-powered sensor network uses real-time environmental data to support early fire detection and emergency response across the city's forests, parks and reserves.

What's the problem? Council and emergency services lacked real-time environmental data to detect fire risks early or respond effectively to emergencies in remote areas, including forests and reserves. Instead, the council and Fire and Emergency New Zealand relied on public reports, creating delays in detecting emerging threats and responding to extreme weather events that increasingly affect the city and suburban parks.

Problem solved: The council deployed a network of smart sensors equipped with technology that transmits real-time data on weather conditions, water levels, and onsite visuals to a cloud-based management system accessible by council staff and emergency services. The sensors provide localised environmental intelligence from remote locations, enabling early fire detection in high-risk areas and flood monitoring on rivers, eliminating the guesswork in emergency response and allowing timely public warnings.

Productivity gains: Since establishing the initial network with 15 sensors across Bottle Lake Forest, Naval Point and the Port Hills, the council is now expanding with 12 additional sensors in suburban parks, reserves along the Heathcote and Avon Rivers, and at Little River as part of a three-year trial. The network provides Fire and Emergency New Zealand with real-time situational awareness for emergency incidents, while giving council staff the data they need to monitor community safety and issue timely warnings. The adaptable, future-proofed system can continue meeting Christchurch's monitoring needs as new technologies are introduced.

Smart Christchurch Manager Grace de Leon says the sensors will provide localised real-time data about weather conditions, flood monitoring and visual imaging.

> "This data will be available to Council staff and emergency services, such as Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), to help them respond effectively to emergency situations, manage community safety and issue timely public warnings."

> "During the trial period we can assess the benefits the sensor network provides, and what potential there is for us to build on it. The network is adaptable and future-proofed, so it can continue to meet Christchurch's monitoring needs as new technologies are introduced."

SECTION 5

Productivity actions

A practical action list for Kiwi businesses

Spark has supported many New Zealand organisations, and it is from this basis we offer these key actions that organisations across all sectors can implement to improve productivity.

Think long term

- Rethink the meaning of productivity, from doing more with less to creating a competitive advantage and creating growth enablers for the long term.
- Introduce the concept of a virtuous cycle where businesses invest in making improvements in process, people and the tools to create time, cost savings and/or opportunities, and reinvest those benefits.
- Set productivity targets as ambitious as your revenue targets – if you're aiming for a 10% revenue growth, why not also a 10% efficiency improvement?
- Calculate the true cost of your current inefficiencies. Any business case for change will be clearer when you quantify your waste.

Get honest about your current state

- Start measuring the performance of processes, your operations, overtime, on an ongoing basis. This will help maintain focus, but also recognise the improvements made.
- Understand the critical path for the delivery of your service or product. Understand the steps taken from start to finish, how long they take and where the bottlenecks are.
- Benchmark your processes, if possible, against an international competitor or what is considered best practice, not just your local rivals. This will help minimise a myopic view of performance.

Leverage technology you're already paying for

- Understand your current asset base, what you're using, and what you're not. Remove any unused technology.
- Enable integration and automation features within your current technology stack to remove manual intervention and effort, and improve quality and consistency.
- Gradually transfer manual processes or applications to your current cloud platform to support application modernisation, automation and reduce processing costs.

Bring in external expertise strategically

- Partner with technology providers who bring proven expertise and industry best practices to accelerate your productivity gains. Choose providers who prioritise knowledge transfer and team training alongside implementation. Building your internal capability ensures sustainable improvements long after the initial deployment.
- Take advantage of flexible engagement models to access specialist skills in AI, cloud infrastructure or process automation.
- Technology partners can provide an external viewpoint to identify blind spots in your productivity approach.

Invest in your people's productivity

- Target staff training and development in specific productivity tools and techniques, not just general professional development.
- Ask your team: "What's the biggest waste of time, what's slowing you down? How can we move faster?" Armed with this information, test possible improvements and if it makes a positive difference, adjust your ways of working.
- Strategic investment in technology can give staff the opportunity to learn new skills and reduce workplace frustrations leading to improved workforce engagement, job satisfaction and a culture of innovation.

Make processes smarter

- Batch similar tasks instead of context-switching or multi-tasking throughout the day (respond to all emails twice daily rather than constantly; process all invoices at once).

- Create consistency in your processes by using templates and checklists for recurring work. This enables automation and speeds up processing.
- Map where work sits idle between steps. This is known as "wait time" which can often exceed actual work time.

Create a plan and don't leave it to chance

- Adopt a plan and technology implementation roadmap. A Jeff Bezos quote: "Good intentions don't work, mechanisms do". Having a mechanism in place enables you to have clear milestones and planned activity that supports productivity improvements.
- Don't try to digitise or improve everything at once. Prioritise your plan on what is achievable and what will produce the benefits that can be reinvested into the business.
- Build in measurement from day one. Track time saved, errors reduced or capacity increased so you know what's working.

Overcome the common barriers

- For the 42% of businesses who identify they lack knowledge/expertise: partner with providers who can upskill your team while implementing solutions.
- For the 40% of businesses concerned about the price of new technology: explore subscription models and cloud services that convert capital expenditure to manageable operational costs.
- For the 36% of businesses facing resistance to change: involve staff in selecting and designing new processes rather than imposing them top-down.

Improving productivity isn't about revolutionary change overnight. It's about consistently challenging the assumption that "getting by" equals "getting ahead," being honest about performance gaps and taking concrete steps to close them.

While investment in new technologies can be seen as costly, under-investment in technology introduces inefficiency, inconsistency and operational challenges impacting customer satisfaction.

Productivity improvement isn't just about adopting AI, migrating to the cloud, or analysing data. It's about combining knowledge with the right enablers to continuously reduce the time, effort, and resources required to deliver value to customers.

The tools exist and the experts are here to improve New Zealand productivity. What's required is the commitment to move from recognition to action, and from knowing productivity matters, to doing something about it.

– **Penny White**,
GM Business Technology Services at Spark

Spark 2025 research study with New Zealand businesses

- In August 2025, Spark commissioned a research study through Clemenger Group to understand the priorities and challenges affecting New Zealand business decision makers.
- Online survey, conducted amongst Managers, Directors & Owners in organisation with 10+ employees.
- In total, 397 responses were received from New Zealand businesses. The breakdown by business size is: <50 n=157, 50-99 n=83, 100-499 n=84, 500+ n=73
- For analysis purposes the data was weighted to reflect the distribution of NZ businesses with 10-100+ employees.
- The research was completed between 14-31 August 2025.

Sector definition

Primary sector – for example, agriculture, fishing and mining

Secondary sector – for example manufacturing and construction

Tertiary sector provides services – for example retail services, entertainment

Fourth sector – knowledge based, for example research, education, information technology

Endnotes

1 Spark commissioned Clemenger Group to undertake a research study to understand how businesses viewed productivity. A survey of 397 businesses with 10+ employees was conducted between 14th-31st August 2025.

2 New Zealand's Productivity Challenge: New Zealand. **https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/selected-issues-papers/Issues/2025/06/09/New-Zealand-s-Productivity-Challenge-New-Zealand-567560**

3 Accelerating Aotearoa businesses one technology generation forward Report from Spark and NZEIR **https://www.spark.co.nz/online/about/our-company/news/spark-one-tech-gen-forward**

4 Spark commissioned Clemenger Group to undertake a research study to understand how businesses viewed productivity. A survey of 397 businesses with 10+ employees was conducted between 14th-31st August 2025.

5 Milking machine creator recognised 100 years after his invention revolutionised dairy farming. **https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/99362818/milking-machine-creator-recognised-100-years-after-his-invention-revolutionised-dairy-farming**

6 Economy of New Zealand. **https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Zealand/Economy**

7 Joel's latest book: *The Intuition Toolkit: The New Science of Knowing What Without Knowing Why*, Joel Pearson

8 New Zealand's Productivity Challenge: New Zealand. **https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/selected-issues-papers/Issues/2025/06/09/New-Zealand-s-Productivity-Challenge-New-Zealand-567560**

9 New Zealand productivity issues no accident. **https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2025/06/16/productivity-lift-comes-from-innovation.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com**

10 New Zealand Productivity Commission Annual Report 1 July 2023 - 29 February 2024. **https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/annual-report/new-zealand-productivity-commission-annual-report-1-july-2023-29-february-2024**

11 New Zealand Productivity Commission Annual Report 1 July 2023 - 29 February 2024. **https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/annual-report/new-zealand-productivity-commission-annual-report-1-july-2023-29-february-2024**

12 **https://sparkdatacentres.co.nz/news/cloud-spend-to-hit-9b-by-2028**

13 Gartner, Maximize Employee Productivity by Overcoming 4 Emerging Myths Swagatam Basu, Alex Chertoff, Caitlin Dutkiewicz, Rajat Munjal, Atrijit Das, Satyanshu Sapra, Alison Smith, Maia Call, Brent Cassell, May 2025.

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